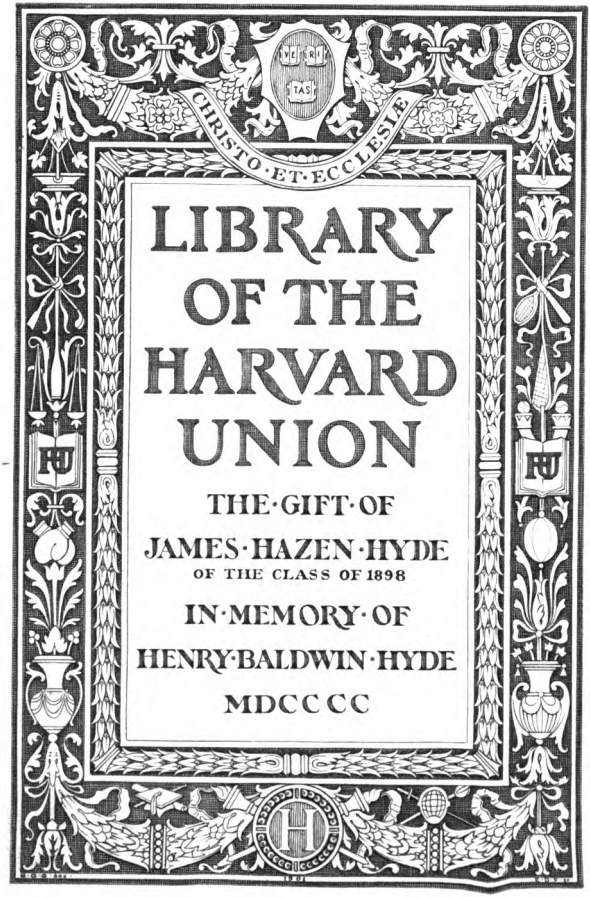
Gee-Boy

by

Cyrus Lauron Hooper



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Contents

The Reason

THAT THE SAYING MAY BE FULFILLED :
"OF THE MAKING OF MANY BOOKS THERE SHALL
BE NO END"

I

GEE-BOY AND THE WORLD

NOW Gee-Boy had much ado to know himself and the world. What with considering such marvels as stars and lilies, and what with muttering intermittently, in a tone of abstraction and mystery, "I am me, I am me," he was often dreamy by day and wakeful by night. There would have been no perplexity if the process of acquaintance-making had been as easy as when he met other children, to whose souls he could grapple his own with hooks of steel by such confidences as "I'm goin' to git some new feesh hooks," or "You cain't guess what our cat's got"—confidences tenderly and timidly given as he swayed from side to side with his finger in his mouth. But knowing himself and the world seemed a far more complicated process, involving the mutual

revelation of three entities, which, by some metaphysical confusion, were made to appear juggled into two. First, there was the World, wonderful, silent, eternal; second, I, pondering all things, communicative, and, like the first, without end; finally, Me, whose qualities were, by conjecture merely, the same as I's. It stands to reason, doubtless, that any entity ought to be single, but it does not stand to fact; if so, how could Gee-Boy or any other man, big or little, even in a blasted ecstasy, say, "I am me"?

To be sure, Gee-Boy was not able to state with philosophic definiteness the perplexities set down here and hereafter—crude, incomplete, boyish, as they were, and not half understood; mere elusive shadows all, which lurked in dark corners of his soul and played hide-and-seek there; hidden, yet powerful in their hiding, and making riot in that boundless realm—his consciousness. Such as they were, however, elusive shadows yet rigorous realities, they had their genesis on a night when he was awakened by the cry of a night-

bird just outside his dormer-window, through which, as he moved in bed, he saw the dark silhouette of one of the four pines that sentinelled the house, and beyond that, infinitely beyond, the deep star-set sky, in which one particularly bright sun beckoned to him. Had the bird called him out of the visions of the night to invite him to a meditation upon his own individuality as apart from that of the unfathomable blue silence? Just little him in the bed there, and the sky above? A speck and an immensity? Then it was that he first said, awe-struck, "I am me."

Such the genesis was; but not so the development, into which there crept a new emotion—one wholly alien to that of the first revelation of himself and the world. He was sitting idly the following day under a great oak in the corner of the orchard, sedately smoking a corn-cob pipe filled with mullein —a pipe in which the Julep-Devil (of whom hereafter) had burned many a fragrant Kentucky leaf, and to which the scent of

the brown roses still clung lovingly. As the boy puffed contentedly, the great bole screening him from prying eyes at the house, he hummed absently a little jingle,—

"Buckwheat cakes and Injun batter
Make you fat, and a little fatter"

(the fact is mentioned merely for the sake of precision and accuracy), when he suddenly threw down the pipe; he felt something groping up out of the penumbra of his consciousness, which led him to repeat, "I am me." The observation moved him profoundly, even painfully, especially when he felt the idea piercing the very central light of his being, where it was subjected to his most sceptical scrutiny. He stood up and leaned against the tree. "And yet," he said (or would have said, had he been able to express himself as clearly, as completely, and as intelligently as other Stagirites), "it cannot be. It seems improbable on the face of it. It is just as likely as not that I am somebody else. But I can't prove even this, for it is clear that if

I were somebody else, I should still think I am myself. And whether I am Me or somebody else, what am I anyway but"— He could pursue the strange feeling no further; his head was filled with millions of tortuous spirals that ran out in attenuated waves to the boundaries of his little brain, burning it into sparkling coruscations, and making the world seem a wilderness of teeming wraiths. Then terror seized him lest he were not at all, and lest the world about him were not real, but only a dream or a dream's shadow. He put out his hand, and even his head, with a sudden convulsive movement, and felt the rough bark of the oak; then fell upon all fours and groped along the grassy earth, trying in vain, as it swayed to and fro beneath him, to convince himself of its substantiality. Now, all this was mere plagiarism on the part of Gee-Boy; Plato, Wordsworth, Emerson, and others of the world's great, whose finer pates were fuller of finer dirt than his, had felt the same fears; but, truth to say, had pursued them

no further; for he who treads this world and gazes fixedly into the one unseen, between bumping his shins against one and dimming his vision in the other, is likely to fall into much confusion.

The remembrance of this agony was long a source of torture to Gee-Boy. He recalled all too vividly how his inmost being seemed the prey of volcanic forces; how weak his limbs when the paroxysm was gone; how tottering his steps, how faint his voice, how cold his head—such were the birth-throes of philosophy. At a distance lay the pipe, and the mullein leaf with its edge burnt to a crisp and curly ash. He had petulantly thrown an acorn at them, prompted, doubtless, by that new emotion so wholly alien to that of the first revelation—a feeling that Something had used him and his inmost life for its sport. Hitherto he had felt that the world was his playground; now he suspected that the world used him for a bauble, and slyly derided him. Unfortunate child—not to have felt the portent of it! *Heu vatum ignare*

mentes! However, he must have been beholden to that day's events, for in memory of his meditations there, and those in his bed the night before—meditations than which no others in his whole after-experience struck more fundamentally at the questions that are eternal—he dubbed the tree Pimpernock, a name indicative, perhaps, of its happy state of woodenness, its enforced innocence of such vain speculations as "I am me"; and under its green dome he loved to loaf and invite his soul.

And he invited his soul to a feast of strange riddles—mere trivial riddles, which come as naturally as measles to a child six years old going on seven; riddles about this impossible universe, and this wildly tragic comedy we call life. Did the morning stars actually sing together? Was the moon angry with him that it would not let him catch up with it, though he ran as long as his breath lasted? And this same moon—when it turned to blood and came dribbling down to fill the rivers, would all the fishes turn red?

Sometimes he feared this horned rover of the night, thinking it a devil. There were other devils, too, no doubt, cavorting among the worn-out suns and moons beyond the edge of the world, where the river, the sky, and the setting sun met; he was determined to go there when he became older and braver, peep over and have a look at them, frolicking down there in the dusky abyss. The lightning, too, and the thunder, troubled him. Santa Claus had lighted a candle, perhaps, and God, rushing home hurriedly to blow it out, drove furiously over a bridge whose planking was loose. Heavens! What if the bridge should break and let Him through! This world, he thought, was no place for so holy a person; and in order to avert such a fall, he felt the need of a new theory. Fanfinx, the little girl next door, could formulate no hypothesis as to the lightning; but the thunder, she surmised, was the noise the angels made in drawing their chairs up to the dinner-table—a theory that Gee-Boy very properly rejected. Grieved at the poor

reception of her postulate, Fanfinx speculated anew. Thunder and lightning occurred only in summer, and after they were gone the sky was brighter than before—conclusive proof that a storm was house-cleaning time in Heaven. This, too, was scorned. "Then," said Fanfinx, angrily, "it muth be the angelth grinding corn." Gee-Boy was now compelled to say to his fellow-searcher after truth that her conjectures savoured too much of domesticity to have a place in his theory of the cosmos. Let it be understood that Gee-Boy did not express himself with words so Brobdignagian as domesticity and so esoteric as cosmos; to do so, taxes even the historian. Indeed, it is to be feared that he spoke bluntly, even ungallantly, for Fanfinx, vexed prodigiously, stamped her foot, and shrieked out, "Then itth a giant kicking hith bootth off before he goth to bed. Tho, there now!" Do what he would, Gee-Boy could devise no satisfactory hypothesis; and, compelled to fall back on his first, he resolved never again to step on a spider, which, if

local superstition had any foundation in truth, was sure to cause a storm, and thereby precipitate the deity upon his fallen children.

Then, too, the very existence of this God was a transcendent mystery, an enigma, a paradox. Fanfinx suggested that perhaps he was moulded by a machine that worked all by itself. "Nonsense!" answered Gee-Boy. "You are a very bluxy child. Do you think God was made like a pot or a jug? Besides, who made the machine?" And when the little girl showed pique, he reproved her by saying, "There is things, Fanfinx, 'at no girl can find out." He gazed regretfully after her when she went away with her pretty nose tilted up at its most scornful angle, and determined to solve the problem himself. Other men, too, have tried; and many have made themselves famous immortally by telling us what they didn't know; but the Sphinx still sits by our path and fearlessly propounds the riddle.

Taking him all in all, Gee-Boy would have

delighted the heart of Teufelsdrockh, who could, doubtless, have pulled him up out of many a slough of despond, where, in his weakness and ignorance, he became hopelessly begrimed. Yes, old Teufelsdrockh would have loved him. He did not live at ease "in the midst of wonders and terrors"; for him the rising of the sun never lost its mystery; man was more to him than a lay figure adorned with clothes-thatch; and he would have scorned the dictum of Swift, had he ever heard it, that the lord of creation is "a forked straddling animal with bandy legs," unless indeed it were supplemented by the observation of the Philosopher of Old Clothes. It was Gee-Boy's burning desire to find out why things are as they are, to put his ear to the Sphinx's lips, hear the whispered truth, and do something about it; and to this end he devoted his young life.

Under such impulse it was but natural that he should find the smaller enigmas of existence almost as imperative in their

demands upon him as the great ones. For instance, did God put sand in Adam when he made him? In the light of the famous blame-shifting answer, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat," it seemed improbable. And how did it happen that he, Gee-Boy, was born on a knob above the little metropolis of Hoosierdom rather than in some other place, as India or China? By what pre-natal luck had he been saved from a pigtail and a diet of rats? Was it true that horses ("to-block-kos," he called them) sprang from the roots of horse-radish? Strange, insane idea! How could it ever have popped into his little noddle? Again, how could the small white birch at the foot of the knob stir up just as big a wind as Pimpernock or the four pines that stood before the house? Did a sheep-dog ever wonder why he was not a sheep? When he, Gee-Boy, shrivelled to a leathern figure smoking a clay pipe in the chimney corner, would he grow young again? Would Potchy and

Monna grow young again—as young as when they were "bornd"? Which naturally suggested the questions: "What makes us bornd? How do we do it? What are we bornd for?" He sometimes thought, too, that dishonest people lived in crooked streets; that a twin was always a thief; that Mrs. Lamb, the minister's wife, looked like a sheep; that when a star shot across the sky, some one was going to Heaven; that a wart would disappear if he buried, secretly, a piece of raw beefsteak; that something terrible would happen when time leaped from the nineteenth to the twentieth century; that it must have hurt the little chickens when God thrust the feathers in; that all men who wore pulse-warmers were kidnappers; that women were very brave for not screaming when they thrust the hat-pins through their heads; that the river-bed must be very tired of its burden; that the man who played the trombone in the band thrust the brass rod down his throat; that the monkeys in the cocoanut-trees stared so long at the growing

nuts that their pictures were taken on them; that niggers were black because God ran out of common white dust and had to use river mud; that the marriage knot was in the minister's handkerchief; that doctors never die; that if he should plant a feather a chicken would grow; that little pitchers have big ears; that he could catch a bird by putting salt on its tail; that horse-hairs would turn into little wriggling snakes if put into the rain-barrel; that the little clouds were sheep hurrying home before a storm; that a wish made on a new sidewalk would always come true; that he could prevent the cat from mewing by pouring oil down its throat; together with other common beliefs of gullible childhood, which it were a weariness to enumerate all in one breath.

Did Gee-Boy think over all these things at once, and in such wild disorder? Yes, for he frequently conned over his stock of perplexities, wonderments, and strange beliefs, both those self-generated and those acquired by forgotten accidents—took an

inventory, as it were, as he sprawled on the grass by Pimpernock's great bole; and one order was as good as another. The weariness of futile wonder overtaking him at last, a few scattering queries would follow at intervals until he fell asleep. For a taste: Why didn't the fish drown? Their condition was a sad one and a parlous, and to be met only by fasting and prayer. Fasting was easy, for no baited hook hung before them by night, and then there was the winter, when no man fished. But prayer involved an attitude of supplication, and, reflecting that fins could not be clasped and tails kneeled upon, he found himself confronted by the same stone wall that he encountered in every excursion he made into the nature of things. Then, whc named the flowers? and by whom did the forget-me-not wish to be remembered? And how could any one possibly tell when a baby was a year old? What, too, would Monna, the trousers-mender, do (the thought was alarming as well as curious) if the hole should ever be bigger

than the patch? He believed, too, that an angel followed him wherever he went; and when he passed through a door he closed it carefully and slowly, lest he should crush his heavenly guard. Down in the town was a narrow way that he called New Moon Street, because he had once seen at its end the great orange disk. Here he said he had a house in which he kept many wonderful things, and to which he would take Fanfinx to live some day when he married her. No new thing could be mentioned but he would say, "Yes, I have that in my little house in New Moon Street." Houses in general were sacred to him; and he always dedicated new ones in the vicinity by going there under the escort of the Julep-Devil, and eating a little lunch among the shingles and shavings, thereby enshrining the new abodes and giving them his benediction.

Finally, in all his perplexities, there was none stranger than the feeling he had about the three steps that led down a tiny bit of hill between the kitchen door and the wood-

shed. If he approached from the left, by the well and the locust-stump, there was nothing unusual about it all; but if he came from the right, by the rain-barrel, the whole place seemed to have a mist of unreality about it, as if a dream of a place visited long before. An unaccountable thing—to think of one place as two! The impression had a giant grip upon him. A moment's loitering by the rain-barrel was a flight into distant lands, lands hallowed by romance, and was followed by a feeling of homesickness, which could be dispelled quickly by a circuit of the woodshed and a touch of the well curb.

Yet one thing more must be said, and without flippancy or irreverence—that Gee-Boy loved the Night. From his window he could drink in her Stygian beauty. This was a dormer-window in his Potchy's house, a long, half-frame, half-brick dwelling, topping Blue Knob, one of a wide semicircle of abrupt hills that shut in a town upon a wide river. Before the house, and just beyond the old-fashioned Greek porch, were four great pines

whose trunks exuded gum that puffed out in sticky bubbles and ran down in resinous streaks, and whose boughs were always sighing a mournful story that the child could not understand. Perched in his window-seat when he should have been asleep, he would listen to their whispers and watch the fire-fly lights of the town below, the fierce columns of solid flame that shot up from a long line of foundries on the water's edge, the thousand reflected lamps of the steamboats, and the sparks from their stacks; while beyond the river he could see a large city with its faint twinkle of street lamps in orderly files, and two or three illuminated clock-dials glowing like moons hid in mists. Here in his window, too, he heard the Night's thousand mystic noises—before and below him the shouts of belated workmen to their horses, the cries of mothers calling their broods to rest, the drone of steel rollers shaping white-hot ingots of metal between their grooved surfaces, and the unearthly bellow of steamboats; while close about him,

and from the orchard and the knob behind him, came somnolent wood-notes—the chatter of black birds in their rookery, the distant hoot of prowling owls, the rasping song of crickets, and the unceasing susurrus of the pines. If he leaned out of the window and looked up, there was the sky alone, deep-blue, and star-set; full of mystery and wonder, infinite in its deeps, not to be pierced by human eye. At length the sand-man would send him to bed, happy that he was alive, and happy that he could sleep with the sights and sounds of the city before him, and the voices of the fields and woods about him; and the sombre Night above him.

But alas! Unhappy he, yes, thrice and four times unhappy, who takes the advice of the sage and hitches his waggon to a star! he must ride alone. One night when Fanfinx was allowed to play with Gee-Boy beneath the pines much longer than the custom was, they wearied at last of childish gambols, and sank down to rest upon the thick carpet

of pine needles. At that instant the Queen of the Night appeared to the left, just over the roof of the house, looking more soft and sentimental than ever before. Her yearning face was obscured by thin wisps of frothy vapour, her own fine-spun exhalations perhaps, or, perhaps, nebulous whiffs from the milky-way; and her own light was softly filtered through. Into Gee-Boy's heart came a tender burning that would have been sufficient unto itself; but the feminine presence beside him threw fuel upon it, and it blazed up fiercely, and permeated to the very centre of his soul; for Fanfinx was passing fair to look upon, sitting there beneath the pines with her face saddened o'er with beams of the shrouded moon. An unutterable something within the boy panted and struggled for utterance; but all he could say, with his voice a-tremble, was,—

"Oh, Fanfinx! Don't the moon look bee-yoo-tiful?"

Now Fanfinx was slow of speech, but her words were Hybla music: thee had the

thweeteth little lithp 'at ever wath. A moment she twitched and squirmed as the responsive sentiment worked its way up from the abyssmal recesses of her consciousness outward to her twisted tongue, and the child-lover felt her fervour pulsing and tingling.

"Yeth," she said, "it lookth juth like a pancake comin' up out of the tchimbly."

Gee-Boy recoiled. The night breezes caressed him unperceived. He had thought that Fanfinx was riding behind him, trailing along behind the star; but lo! she was only dragging after him in the dirt, innocent of celestial towage. A wild, revengeful, choking paroxysm seized him; it panted and struggled for utterance, but found no voice. *Vox faucibus haesit.* He dug his hands into the ground in his wordless exasperation; his heart pained him, and his head grew hot. Vain, vain! Fanfinx laughed, thinking, no doubt, he was playing mumblety-peg, or digging worms for bait. When his passion had spent its force, he simmered down into

a silent lassitude, and realized in his childish way what he was destined to know more clearly as the years went by—that the paths of dreaming youth lead but to the sordid world.

II

A NEW NOMENCLATURE

IT was not through any conscious disrespect for the nomenclature of Adam (here the narrative plays the crab a little) that Gee-Boy rechristened the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, to say nothing of many individuals of God's noblest creation, but rather in obedience to a strong creative impulse that had been dormant until he had discovered certain incongruities in the existent system of naming. To be sure, Gee-Boy would have had as much difficulty in explaining chronologically all his mental processes in making his designations for God's creatures as in making clear to the unphilosophical mind his perplexities concerning his oft-repeated dictum, "I am me." He was dumb therefore to all querists, big and little. Had he had Shylock's quickness of retort, he might have answered,

"'Tis my humour"; but silent he was before the inquisitorial; and a mystery began to film about the names he made—a mystery he shrewdly accepted, and even cultivated by mumbling strange things over his blocks.

Like his metaphysical speculations, his nomenclature had a beginning worthy of notice. From the first he had had a keen sense of the value of a word; as witness his very first utterance, on the occasion of being stuck by a pin. It was no other word than "Ouch!" (he said it afterward, when the World hurt him); a strong and pregnant word! And when he was just beyond that happy and careless age during which people vibrated his tubby little tum with spread fingers, and said, "Kitchie, kitchie!" with affected spasms of merriment—that is to say, in the semi-articulate stage of infancy, the age in which his words were such as Adam's journeymen might have made—he was much put to it for a vocal symbol of a sound he heard—a sound heard before, but not pondered upon; it struck his ear with all the

force of a wholly new thing. This was the very first sign of approaching maturity in Gee-Boy; for, look you, a baby, like a colt, at first accepts all the world as strange, and shies at it or not, as the whim moves him; it is only when some things begin to pall by custom that he detects strangeness in others.

Now this sound was a long-drawn raucous blast, mellowed by distance and by something that found no answering word in the child's slender vocabulary—echoes, in ours; reverberations along miles and miles of wooded hills. He opened his eyes and listened. All his being was alert. His look and attitude, as the lengthened trumpet was twice repeated, said more plainly than words, "What was that?"

The knob-top until recently had been covered with snow for so far back that Gee-Boy's mind ran not to the contrary, and cold winds had sung fiercely in the chimneys and pushed the fine white crystal-dust under the doors. As he had pressed his nose flat against the window-pane to see the white drifts in the fence corners, and to wonder

sometimes at the sudden blotting out in white flakes of town and river below, now for many happy days he gazed from the window, sometimes open, upon the active disappearance of the drifts in runnels, upon the sprightly new-come green of grass and trees, and listened to the song of the robins that hopped across the yard. And out into this new riotous-hearted spring weather, the sweet young mother took the small boy, hooded and rubber-booted, on a pilgrimage to find the source of that long succession of reverberations.

They left the yard and threaded a berry patch, whence, crossing the orchard, they reached the wood-clad edge of the knob. Far below, down over the tree-tops, was the yellow river; and half-way across, ploughing fiercely along, was a long narrow house, with many long porches; and up from its middle stuck two long chimneys with serrated tops, from which rolled columns of smoke as black as black. Suddenly, from the roof of a little house or coop in front of the stacks

came a white burst of steam, and two seconds later that long-drawn raucous blast that set the knobs to bellowing, until Gee-Boy's ear received the message in successive and overlapping reboundings from every hill as far down the river as he could see. This thing, he was told, when the dumbness of his wonder wore off, was called a steamboat.

Meagre name for such a marvel! A little pain began to clutch at his hitherto unsaddened heart.

The steamboat had scarcely quieted herself at her wharf, when the heavens leaped into flame and universal detonation, followed by stunning reverberations; something had burst terrifically; and afterward there was a mighty grumbling about it. In it all was that riotous gladness; Spring had broken the last bonds of Winter. Gee-Boy was unafraid; the riotous gladness had broken into his heart. "Id dit a teamboat too?" he asked, low-toned and solemn-eyed.

"It is the first thunder of Spring," said the sweet, young mother.

That day was the first never to fade from Gee-Boy's memory. The whistle of a steamboat and the first thunder of Spring! The day seemed almost too heavily laden with treasure. Those voices were the voices he loved best in all the world, except—but of that anon.

Yet he went home with the little pain clutching at his full heart. Thunder was a good name for the sound from Heaven; but steamboat! It hurt him strangely, and he didn't know how to ease him of the hurt. Had he had a riper understanding, he would have said: Life is a poem whose theme is the beauty of the world; and the words must be well chosen.

That words should be chosen at all soon came to be a wonder to him. "Mamma, what makes us talk?" he asked. "How can we talk? What makes me go wiggle here (finger on stomach) when I laugh?" All day mamma went to and fro at her duties, vainly endeavouring, between times, to explain to her small son this world of

mysteries; her duty, too, for had she not brought him into them?

A great wonder—this wonder of a word! He would ponder over one till it seemed unreal; and if he did not think it a good one, he would use it no more.

When Gee-Boy had spent more than a year in intermittent rumination upon the matter, he began to feel sure that something would come of it; and at this time his parents took him on a long journey into a distant region called Texas. His eyes grew big when they drove away to the wharf where the *Tarascon* ("*Scarascon*," he called her) stood blowing black smoke from her stacks, for he had no hope of seeing again his own, his native land. Texas was a country of Cimmerian darkness, far beyond the place where the river slid treacherously over the edge of the world; and how could the chugging leviathan that carried him ever sound the abyss, unless it should unfurl wings then concealed and float down upon the murky air? There passed a weary time, a time

infinitely lengthened with big-eyed expectation of a death plunge every time the shock of a sand bar was felt, until sleep soothed the little brain and calmed the little heart. The morning brought courage, and the next morning more; but the evening ushered in a dark forest of steamboat stacks along a curving shore, upon which was such a wilderness of twinkling houses, and such a Babel of sounds, that new and nameless terrors beset the child's breast. The perils he threaded in the next half-hour in the progress to a hotel peopled his dreams that night with fearsome shadows; and early the next day, when speeding Texasward, he saw the sun rising in the north; the moon, too, was there when night came. Columbus and his mariners were not more justly alarmed at the freaks of the compass. It was yet night when the three left the train. They were met by a man named Ecker, were driven a thousand miles or so in a carriage, through night, night, night, until they reached a house far away, and very, very near the edge

of the world, which was to be expected of a land where there was no day; and Gee-Boy was put to bed holding his mother's hand, saying, "Now I lay me" again and again, with the fervour of one who never expects to awake.

But morning came, bright-eyed; and the sky was blue, the air pure, the prairie wide and beautiful, the edge of the world farther away than ever before; and Gee-Boy was amazed, and knew that the Lord was good.

This day among all the hypocritical daughters of Time was destined to be the beginning of Gee-Boy's renaming of all creation; for it happened that his little unskilled tongue could not say Mr. Ecker and Mrs. Ecker; and it was only after many repeated trials and many spasmodic hitches and twitches in his brain-works that he substituted Deckee and Decko. Note the inflections, philologists all; this is no fable.

Bubbling over with contentment at having discovered a way to circumvent the impedi-

ment in his speech, Gee-Boy went into the farmyard on a voyage of discovery. Among the currant and gooseberry bushes he discovered a strange race of beings that he supposed were little Texas boys and girls, and no doubt the progeny of his host and hostess. "Id you Deckee's an' Decko's iddle boyd an' dirld?" he shouted, rushing upon them; and so greatly to their consternation that they scattered with strange cries—all but one, the Alexander of his race; nothing daunted, he turned upon Gee-Boy, shut up a great fan he carried behind him, stretched forth an isthmian neck, at the end of which was a little head most unartistically adorned in red flannel, and said something in a loud, tremulous throaty quaver—Texas lingo, no doubt. "Gooble-ooble-ooble," were the exact words. "Dooble-ooble-ooble," quoth Gee-Boy, mockingly; and then ran at the creature, flaunting his arms and shouting defiance.

"Hi there, you little stick-in-the-mud," bellowed a big voice, "leave them turkeys alone. Skedaddle now."

"Turkeys," then, they were called. How absurd to apply such a name to creatures that could say nothing but "Dooble-ooble-ooble!" And the man had accosted him with a most inappropriate epithet, inasmuch as he had ever escaped quagmires. This person, he saw on turning, was clothed in leather, was topped by a hat like the moon, wore an enormous pistol and a great knife in his belt, and had spurs on his feet. He glared at Gee-Boy savagely.

"I ain't afwaid o' you," said the child, with a strut; "you nuddin' but a bull-boy." Whereat the armoured gentleman laughed immoderately, that the saying might be fulfilled,—a bumptious answer turneth away wrath.

In his exploration of the place Gee-Boy discovered other strange inconsistencies, disproportions, and dissonances between life and names—mere trivial ones, and not vital, yet of weight enough with the child mind. This bad bull-boy was called John Good. And another of the breed, whom he had

seen that morning astride a pony that he nearly weighed to the earth, was designated Tom Little. The black mammy, whose colour stuck in spite of the spume of the tubs, was called Aunt Lucy White; while Mrs. Brown, the wife of a neighbour, was very pale; and her "hard girl," who, by the way, was very soft, though called Sally Green, was the colour of the afterglow. And there came that day rumours of a person whose official title was the Texas Essor—a nomination whose meaning Gee-Boy accurately conjectured; he had a playmate at home, a little Dutchman, who used a word similar to the second, and it meant to eat. What was Gee-Boy's disgust, then, on the man's arrival, to find that instead of proving himself the greatest eater in the land, he did nothing but talk of money and the rate in Texas, whatever that was, and went away declining an invitation to dinner.

After observing such manifest imbecilities, and coming to the conclusion that most words were "up tide wrong," Gee-Boy was

pleased to find a person who had discarded conventional speech, preferring his own, which, though perhaps not euphonious, was certainly free, so far as observable, from foolish incongruities. This person was a boy somewhat in advance of Gee-Boy in years, and much in advance in linguistic attainments. He lived by a gully down the road, where a creek crossed, and by way of introducing himself, remarked sociably and with evident excitement, "Paw teh tat teh muh wah; tau ole Tah Whihnan yeh cah; Gaw gang, deh way heh!" This enigmatic confidence was accompanied by gestures toward the gully, whence came cat yells and howls sufficiently interesting to induce Gee-Boy to accompany his new acquaintance thither. Near a hut that served as a stable, the two found a yellow cat caught in a steel trap set in the edge of the muddy stream. "Gaw gang, deh way heh!" repeated the boy, excitedly; and the two, at the expense of a picturesque spattering, released the poor animal, which ran away at once, limping,

and returning no thanks. It was only after much questioning and the closest consideration of the circumstances that Gee-Boy made English out of his friend's chatter, thus, "Pa set a trap to catch a muskrat; it caught old Tom Whistnand's yellow cat," . . But the import of the rest this deponent sayeth not.

Now Gee-Boy's observation of the incongruities of his native tongue, his own chance successes in improvements, and his admiration for the boy who had invented a new language moved him to attempt the making of new words whenever he had a feeling, however vague and intangible, that existing ones were less good than they should be. Soon after the return from Texas he heard his mamma say, "Of all the nasty words, nasty is the nastiest," and the saying reinforced his belief that there is a best sound to represent any given idea. And again, his papa tried to teach him a poem beginning

"I'm not a chicken; I have seen
Full many a chill September,"

a poem that he memorised, under protest, until he reached the lines,—

> "I saw them straddling through the air,
> Alas! too late to win them,"

when he rebelled outright, maintaining that no one ever said such a silly word as "Alas"; and this recollection reinforced his belief that there was a worst sound to represent any given idea. To cast out the bad and to supplant them with the best possible sounds, and even to create new words for their own beauty, now became Gee-Boy's dearest employment.

Even into advanced manhood he remembered with approval these experiences, and had no sympathy with those unmusical souls (God save the mark!) who see no beauty in a word. He even grew to like sounds unassociated with their meaning, and once made a list of the words he loved most, as doubloon, squadron, thatch, fanfare (he never did know the meaning of this one),

Sphinx, pimpernel, Caliban, Setebos, Carib, susurro, torquet, Jungfrau. He was laughed at by a friend, but logic was his as well as sentiment; an Italian savant maintained that the most beautiful combination of English sounds was *cellar-door;* no association of ideas here to help out! sensuous impression merely! the cellar-door is purely American.

As Gee-Boy grew older a dissonance of sound or sense gave him a pain, and made him petulant. He could not endure the jingle beginning, "The north wind doth blow," for "warm" does not rhyme with "barn," nor "wing" with "then." Nor could he permit himself to say "horse" when "to-block-ko" was the precise word. And when some one called him "Bub," he threw a stone at the offender, and went away to the great oak in the orchard, beneath which he fumed and fretted himself into a whirl of corybantic antics until he had attained an ecstasy that would have been the envy of a Neo-Platonist. Out of his mental turmoil came a new name

for himself—Gee-Boy, a far more expressive denomination than "Bub," or "Turner Dexter Brown," the name in the birth record in the family Bible; and his papa became Potchy-Potchy Fat Man, and his mamma Monna-Monna Slim Lady, and his Irish nurse Goo-Goo (if Nora could have felt the contempt!), and the knob Widje, and the great oak Pimpernock, as before mentioned.

At other times, with less wear and tear of body and mind, other coinages were struck from the die of his fancy, of which no catalogue need be made. But he could never devise a good word for steamboat. Despairing thus of a complete nomenclature for the concrete, how much greater his difficulty in renaming the abstract! And feeling at times the necessity of suggesting an idea which passed the power of speech to utter, or of describing something too remarkable for good or bad to be fittingly described in words of definite meaning, he coined a word of wide significance—*bluxy*, containing *x*,

expressive of the unknowable, a fact that Gee-Boy, seer that he was, divined.

To this account of likes, dislikes, and coinages must be added his satisfaction in a certain word, but his aversion to hearing it pronounced—a word which, for Gee-Boy's sake, the biographer would gladly refrain from writing; it was—necessity being the spur—Jesus; for the pious pronounced it oilily, in a manner to bring twitches of apologetic self-consciousness about the mouth-corners of the listeners; and the vulgar said it profanely. True reverence should enshrine the word, and speak it not.

Now one day Gee-Boy discovered a new star, vagrant from the skies. A doctor, a man who could not die, moved into the one other house on the knob, and our hero soon found himself looking through the fence at a little girl somewhat younger than himself. His look was not direct or ingenuous; in truth, he was sprawling and squirming on the grass in pure love of life and joy at the touch of earth, when he saw her first; and

he continued by way of attracting attention, perhaps admiration, thus aiding himself by song,—

"Gee-Boy is my name;
Bluxy is my nation;
Widje is my dwelling place,
And Potchy's my salvation."

She, on her side the pickets, with an exaggerated look of unobserved innocence, was flitting about, munching an apple and singing lispily,—

"Lady bird, lady bird, fly away home,
Your houth ith on fire and your tchildren alone."

"Hello, Red Head," said he, amiably.

"Hello, Angle Worm," she retorted.

For a moment Gee-Boy was amazed at the peculiar wingedness of her words; then he rolled in laughter on the grass, while she gazed solemnly through the pickets. Soon he propped his chin in his hands, dug his toes into the cool earth, and observed,—

"You musn't call me Angle Worm."

"You muthn't call me Red Head."

"You must call me Gee-Boy, and I will call you Fanfinx; but I won't tell you what it means."

"My name ith Grathe Helen Grubbth."

"Pooh! It's an ugly name. Fanfinx is much prettier, and it means something nice. Ask your mamma if you can come over and play." He made up his mind that he would marry this little girl when he grew up and was a pilot on the river; for that was the ambition of every boy who did not want to become a stage driver or a clown.

With mamma's permission that she might stay "a nour," she scaled the fence (preferring it to the gate), tearing her dress on the pickets; and the two went away into the orchard and began to construct a farm under Pimpernock—a farm with fences (kleptotches), houses (thatchflips), stables (eevers), horses (translated before), cows (moogers), and so forth (iddle wattle klammer; literally, everything else). Gee-Boy found Fanfinx a creature of delightful moods; sometimes no screaming jay-bird could be saucier; some-

times her tones were as plaintive as a pee-wee's, when its nest is robbed; sometimes she was as bluxy as heart could wish. And when she talked or ate, her nose winked just like a rabbit's—in the fetchingest way. A vagabond star, surely! And so they played happily ever after.

"What maketh you make names for eferybody, Tjee-Boy?" she asked one day.

Gee-Boy squirmed. This was the question he always evaded. "I don't," he said.

"Yeth, you do. You call your papa Potchy, and your mamma Monna, an' me Fanfinkth; an' nen you call Tom Hook the Tjulep Deffil."

"Pooh! That ain't a name."

"What ith it, then?"

"It's just a—well, anyway, I didn't make that one. Tom ain't worth a name. I just heard a man he was talking with at the barn say he was a devil of a fellow for mint juleps, so I called him the Julep Devil; an' he laughed—glub-glubbed, I mean—awful."

"What ith a mint tjulep, Tjee-Boy?"

"Oh, it's green, and it makes you drunk."

"Oh, oh!" Fanfinx opened her eyes very wide, and of her mouth she made a horrified little hole. Then she put a Pharisaical expression on her small face, and added, "You'th wicked; you thaid deffil."

Gee-Boy was about to retort, "You did too," but the pleasure that every healthy male creature feels at being thought a trifle satanic, stopped his speech and brought tremulous lines of sly gratification about the corners of his mouth. Indeed, the one redeeming trait of Tom Hook, hostler to Potchy-Potchy Fat Man, was a certain unconventionality in matters ethical, a studious rendering unto Cæsar of the things that are God's. Tom smoked, chewed tobacco like a grasshopper, swore, drank the green intoxicant, was a patron of dog-fights, even fought himself, and few there were who had the temerity to tread on the tail of his coat. From his associates he had received the name of Dutch, though why, no man knoweth; his dog, from a reason more appa-

rent, was called Low Dutch; and the two believed in that most ancient of beatitudes, Blessed are the war-makers, for they shall inherit the earth. Gee-Boy's sense of the necessity of public morality made him shrug his shoulders with grave concern, when the Julep Devil's peccadillos were stigmatized; but in his secret soul he thought they were all more or less admirable, just as many grave and reverend citizens publicly denounce lynchings, when in their hearts they think the rope deserved its victim. He had an innate abhorrence of the showily righteous, those who made yielding not to temptation the principal enjoyment of life, those who delighted to say sanctimoniously, "Beware, young man, the rapids are below you;" and if politeness permitted, he kept out of the way of their caresses and their patronage. Once, when a pious person with a creviced countenance and a leathern neck presented him with a cup inscribed with the legend, "For a Good Boy," he received it demurely, left the room after a courteous delay, and

with an ostentatious display of accident, dropped it down the well. A similar fate was awarded a primer some one had thrust upon him. It was stained with age, was very ugly, and venerable. It attracted him little. A faint praise rose to his lips when he read the jingle,—

"Zaccheus he
Did climb a tree
Our Lord to see;"

but when he painfully spelled out,—

"Young Obadias,
David, Josias,
All were pious,"

and was told to be emulous of them, he clandestinely tore out the leaf, mended his kite with it, and thrust the volume under the big bookcase in the sitting-room, pretending that it was lost. Being pious, then, not even as much as Peter Cartwright was sanctified —in spots—he had a sneaking admiration for the merry hostler who comforted him

with pipes and fights, and stayed him with mint juleps; yet he did not hold this bibulous person sufficiently high in his regard to coin him a name, cultivating him rather for his own mirth than the other's virtue.

As the stream of Gee-Boy's consciousness became wider and deeper and swifter, the words he made became so numerous that his conversation was often unintelligible even to Fanfinx, to whom his sayings sometimes seemed freighted with all the mystery of an oracle—an effect he delighted to produce, his only regret being the frequent failure from his inability to find suitable names for some things. There were the pine trees and their mournful whispers, the impression the night made upon him with her thousand still voices and her stiller silences, the perplexing doubt as to the identity of "I" and "Me," and the shadowy, creepy feeling that he and all about him were a dream—these things were beyond expression. This he had learned one day when he attempted to explain to Fanfinx the foundations of his

philosophy. Now her problems of human destiny were summed up in two words, dolls and preserves; and all of her trials came from the maternal assurance that most of the things she wanted to do were either unhealthful or wicked; so, confused by the identity of "I" and "Me," perplexed, hopelessly muddled, Fanfinx stared at the young metaphysician, groped about for a clew, and after a dull drag of silence, asked him, her underlip inundated the while, whether he didn't wish gooseberries were ripe. So he kept all these secreter and profounder things nameless, and alone in his own soul.

Here only did Gee-Boy have something like his will—in this sporting with words; and long after, he looked back upon the days that made them as happy days. All other things he attempted came to naught: he asked of the Infinite what it was, and was not answered; of the finite what it was, and received no reply but a threat of death; he begged love of a woman, and received it not; he sought fame, and found failure;

he asked of everything that his power as a being be felt, but in the end he found himself limited by all things, defeated by all things, all but thrust aside by all things. This one little whim was his one possession—the bud of a poetic genius, afterward nipped—with which he might work his pleasure. Later, the impress of civilisation was felt too keenly; had he been a savage, he would have begun a mythology; which is to say—a religion.

III

THE BEAST WITH THE CRINKLY HORN

THERE was a little rutty road that ran round the northern side of the knob, and, twisting along a ragged stone wall that bordered a branch where the water quarrelled with the calamus, entered a clump of brush and disappeared into the unknown. Gee-Boy had ever longed to follow it, believing that it ran in dark and sinuous ways to the end of the world, and plunged off into that region so densely populated with horrors for which he had no adequate name, but which a greater than he has called Gorgons, and Hydras and Chimeras dire. Had the ambitious young Frobisher waited until his courage were equal to the task, he would have delayed until the visions of childhood had been dissi-

pated by the skepticism of boyhood; but circumstances were destined to drive him into a mood in which he underrated dangers, —nay, even courted them.

The circumstances were nothing less than these—that he had widened his life and narrowed his liberty by beginning to go to school; and the things he learned there (to say nothing of the things he didn't learn) drove him to believe that the world is one great aggregation of paradoxes and perplexities. True it is that the consciousness of knowledge, and therefore of power, was growing in him—power evidenced in many ways, as, for example, in writing, from dictation, love letters for Sally, the dusky one that presided over the pots and pans—letters always beginning "Respected Sir," and always ending,—

> "If you love me as I love you,
> No knife can cut our love in two."

On the other hand, not a day passed but some obstinate little obstruction appeared

in his path, perked up its saucy head and said, "What are you going to do about it?" And Gee-Boy longed for the old unillusioned days when there was no law but his own fancy, and Monna taught him out of McGuffy's First Reader and Ray's Elementary Arithmetic. In those days he had entertained the belief that teachers were some sort of spectacled old maids with supernatural powers of knowledge, and the less truthful conviction that the highest class at school was fastened to the ceiling. Reading he had learned with such ease that before he went to school the first day, trembling and breathing like the bellows in the blacksmith's shop at the foot of the knob, he had gone through Robinson Crusoe twice, and nearly through the Arabian Nights, both written in words of one syllable, or, at most, two or three, with hyphens between. And arithmetic was his, even to the Newtonian task of writing 978, 273, 969, 231; but when it came to subtracting 987 from 5,876, his perplexity made his back grow hot and prickly all the

way down. Now here are the figures properly placed for the calculation—

$$\begin{array}{r} 5{,}876 \\ 987 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

It is plain that 7 cannot be taken from 6, 8 from 7, and 9 from 8; but the all-wise teacher and the all-wise rule taught him to borrow and pay back, something like this:

"If the right-hand figure in the subtrahend exceed the figure above it in the minuend, borrow one from the next higher column in the minuend, prefix it to the right-hand figure in the minuend, and subtract, setting the figure below in the result; then add one to the next higher figure in the subtrahend, and subtract it from the figure above it in the minuend; and so proceed."

This, aside from the incongruity of the smaller number having the longer name, was the very button on the cap of Folly; for did he not take 7 from 16, 9 from 17, 0 from 8, and 1 from 5, which is to say, he subtracted 1,097 from 581,716 and had only 4,889 left? Thus was the arithmetic of his memory dizzied.

And there was elementary geography, which provided him with untruthful ideas of the world's surface; he had travelled in one direction as far as Texas, and there had been no sudden transitions from green to pink, from pink to red, and from red to yellow; while, as to the other directions, there was nothing but the lower deeps profound, as everybody knows. The idea of the rotundity of the earth he scouted as fit only for fools and mad—spectacled schoolmarms in short, who took one thousand odd from five hundred thousand odd, and had left only four thousand odd. He would rather be a child at play, and sing "One-ry, o-ry, ick-ry Ann," than to juggle with truth so shamelessly. Yet he admitted one corn of truth in all this chaff of lies—that there was suitable correspondence between the name of this strange lore called elementary geography and the size of the book that contained it.

Gee-Boy's sadness, no doubt, was in part the premonition of disillusion. As gleefully

as he "sicked" his snarling dogs of raillery upon school lore, he could not but admit some changes of opinion wrought in his way of thinking. "Spell *cat*," he remembered to have demanded of Goo-Goo once, when he was yet in a primal state of innocence as regards slates and pencils. "C-a-t," the erudite maiden answered. It seemed to be a feat to be proud of—to spell so glibly, until Gee-Boy reflected that a cat was a very small thing, and he determined to test the nurse's powers on the name of a much larger object. "Spell *waggon*," he commanded. "W-a-g-g-o-n," she returned. The child opened his eyes wide for a moment, and then, nerving himself for the giving of a Herculean labour, said, "Well, I bet you can't spell *world*." And to Gee-Boy's utter rout, Goo-Goo replied, "W-u-r-r-u-l-d." Later, when school lore had begun to penetrate, and the illusion under which he had laboured had been dissipated, he felt a strange uneasiness, such as must come over a traveller on feeling his feet pushing through the crust of a

floating prairie. A fit of trembling seized him one day, when, on seeing the blind staggering of a man who, as he was told, had "been out all night," he wondered whether such were the result of walking upside down during the dark hours; and when, the next night but one, below in the town, he saw a man going down through a circular opening in the street, with a lantern in his hand (if not to hang the lantern out over China, what then?), he felt one of the most cherished articles of his cosmic theory slipping away from him; perhaps the world were round, and fleeing half-shadowed through boundless emptiness. "Things may not be what they seem," he whispered fearsomely; and he took a pumpkin from the garden, and left it on the locust-stump by the well, to see whether it would fall off into space in the night. The result was reassuring; but in obedience to a feeling that the test was not sufficient, he began, after consultation with Fanfinx, to dig a hole in the pasture, exercising great care as he progressed, lest, as he broke

through the crust on the other side, he should fall into the sea or upon a mountain; or, if it should be night there, go hurtling off into the Chinese Heaven. Finally, the boiling energy with which he began the labour, simmered down, and he left off digging, not asserting success, yet denying failure. There was no outcome to all but a hole in the ground, and a sense of shame for having doubted a conception which was really his own. He would permit no more of his articles of belief to totter. Yet he did not despair of school; he hoped that he could learn something true there, and in this hope he was not betrayed.

By the rare condescension of a boy older than himself, a boy who drank from the fount of learning two stories up, near the source, our young searcher after truth was permitted to ascend the stairs one day after school, to peep into the noble science of grammar, a most profound and exacting science, whose laws are as inflexible, and often as intelligent, as the royal will of

George III., renowned in history. The very air was laden with dusty wisdom; there was a large globe by the teacher's desk; and the seats were three inches higher than those in his own room. Gee-Boy's soul was profoundly stirred. A moment of awed silence nerved him to ask his guide for some crumb picked from the six-hour refection of the day. The boy shook his head gravely. "Oh, no," he said, "you couldn't understand it; it is all I can do to understand it myself." But he graciously read aloud a sentence written, with Spencerian accuracy, on the blackboard behind the teacher's desk.

"*Is* is always a verb."

It was a noble verity; and Gee-Boy treasured it in his heart as unassailable. So much, and even more, he owed to his preceptors. They are dead now—all dead. Some were men, and death was all they had to look forward to; and some were women, and they had both death and marriage to look forward to; but now they rest from

their labours, and their works do follow them.

Gee-Boy's confidence in the verbal nature of *is*, would have covered a multitude of discrepancies between life and learning, had he not been driven to desperation by the person who compelled him to subtract one thousand odd from five hundred thousand odd and have less than five thousand left. The task made his back feel hot and prickly all the way down, and one day he put up his slate in disgust. In the moment of idleness, mischief began to brew in his little noddle; when the teacher's back was turned, he kissed the little girl with a gray waist, who sat across the aisle (a sweet lass and rich: her father owned a line of packets, and two stone lions guarded his door). Every child in the room either snickered or said, "Oh—oh!"

"Turner Dexter Brown," said Miss Prim, without turning her head, "come to the desk."

Gee-Boy obeyed.

"Why did you kiss Ruth?"

"Because I couldn't do that example, I guess."

Miss Prim turned around, chalk in one hand, book in the other. "Turner," she said, "I am very jealous of Ruth. You must kiss me too. And twice to-morrow if you fail to get that problem—three times, may be. Now!"

The boys of that school feared the sound of kisses more than they dreaded death and always played Adonis. What then was the teacher's surprise to receive a most chaste and courteous salute! She was abashed; Gee-Boy calm.

Although the culprit felt that he had acquitted himself like a man, he knew he could not face the ordeal the next day; so he sought Potchy that evening as the great man read his paper at ease in his hickory chair on the front porch, and displayed his slate, on which the problem was arranged his way and the teacher's, thus,—

5,876		581,716
987	and	1,097
4,889		4,889

"Potchy," he said, "you'll have to do it; I can't."

"How often have I told you, my son, that there is no such word in the dictionary as 'can't'?" The judge took up the slate. "What is it now?"

"Why, subtraction. Tell me why you borrow from one number, a number that isn't there, and pay back to another number that didn't lend anything. And how can you make the big number so very much bigger, and the little number only a little bigger? And when you take so little from so much; how can you have so little left?"

The judge adjusted his spectacles two or three times, then put on the look he wore when he bade the Hoosiers mark him and write his speeches in their books—a wise look, accompanied by a profound flourish, as if what he were about to say would pass down to history.

"My son," he observed, "you must study this out for yourself. You will learn to do

by doing. Don't forget, now, you must always take the dilemma by the horns."

Gee-Boy thought a long while, and the paper crinkled unsympathetically. At last he piped up a still small voice, "Potchy, did Columbus learn to discover America by discovering it?"

It was a bold question; impudent, in fact, as the still smallness of the voice admitted; and was, moreover, pronounced contempt of court, and punished as such by the judge sitting on the case. But what is a poor benighted searcher after truth to do? And Gee-Boy was angry, and went out and broke his slate on the locust-stump by the well, and swore in good Hoosier oaths that he would go to school no more.

The next morning he moped, feigned a headache, and remained at home. Soon Monna and Goo-Goo went away, leaving him regent of the little kingdom. He dreamed a while, enjoying his freedom, and speculated upon the nature of the horned beast that Potchy had mentioned. Dilemma!

A good word! Except his own coinages, it was the best word he had ever heard (Mugwump was not then invented). And he must take its owner by the horns when he met it. Then it suited his humour to read; but, unable to find Robinson Crusoe, or the Arabian Nights, he took the first book he saw. "Sesame and Lilies" were the golden words on the cover; and he knew them both; for lilies were common, and had he not read of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves? Yet when an hour had passed—an hour of anxious search through the volume—he threw it down in disgust, saying, "Huh! there's nothing about se-same and lilies in that book. Books are like other things—they fool you. Well, who cares? I'm going to lock up the house and follow the little rutty road to the edge of the world; and I don't care if I never come back."

And all this was the reason that this voyage was undertaken before the visions of childhood were dissipated by the scepticism of boyhood.

He locked the house, left a note on the door, as any thoughtful boy would, announcing to Monna that the key was under the step in the usual place, and left the yard—perhaps forever.

Gee-Boy had not gone farther on his desperate adventure than the stone wall that twisted along by the little rutty road, when he heard a wee voice crying after him; and Fanfinx came whirling down the side of the hill, holding up a long skirt above her knees as she fled. She had on, besides, much of her mother's finery—rings, watch with long chain; carried an old-fashioned flowered parasol; and her head was hid in a cavernous red-and-yellow poke bonnet, a relic of antiquity. Such was the state locally known as being dressed up regardless.

"What's the matter, Fanfinx?" asked Gee-Boy. "You look just like a bumblebee in a hollyhock."

"Oh, Tjee-Boy; me tho thcared," she panted, in a tone of petted petulance, at the same time decorously letting down her

skirts so that they dragged the ground full many a rood.

"Scared? What about?"

"There wath a nathty bad peddler-man at the door, an' he athked mamma if thee had any tchildren to thell, an' I runned. Oh, Tjee-Boy, I wath tho thcared—you can't think."

Now Gee-Boy detected the pretence in all this fright, and retorted, "Pooh! You're not a bit bluxy, Fanfinx."

"Now — now — you muthn't thay that, 'cauth I am. You'd a been thcared too. Me goin' with you, Tjee-Boy."

But Gee-Boy wanted no companion who found sufficient satisfaction for her adventurous spirit in so hollow a sham. "I'm going to the edge of the world, and I may never, never come back"—a warning not a little tinctured with hypocrisy in spite of the present disapproval of Fanfinx; for having long observed that the unexpected unavoidably happens, he invariably expected all possible contingencies, thus by tricking Fate escaping disaster; so here.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! what thall I do?" Fanfinx bit her finger-nails and glanced fitfully up the hill, in the prettiest perturbation, toward her own mossy roof. "Well, come on; I don't care; I'd ruther fall over the edgthe than be in the peddler'th thack."

"I reckon you better hadn't; you'll back out."

"No, I won't."

"Honest Injun?"

"Croth my heart."

They hastened on, halting only till the young knight let down the bars beyond the clump of brush; and here fair lady abandoned old fears for new; she was told that they were now in the region of the unknown, and might at any moment be shrouded in the billows of sulphurous mist and darkness that rolled up from the under world.

They walked for hours and hours and hours, crossed the branch three times on stepping stones, climbed fences that straggled along tortuous gullies, and fought their way through clinging brier patches,

until at last Fanfinx's little body was so weary, her skirt so torn, and her bonnet so twisted and bent, that she sat down on the ground and began to cry.

"Oh, Tjee-Boy," she sobbed, "that nathty peddler-man!"

They had come to a little valley-pasture cuddled down among the knobs. In the middle of it, standing very close together, their branches intertwining in brotherly love, were a chinquapin and a persimmon; and Gee-Boy had a strange impression, such as was no unusual thing with him, that he had seen them before. He marvelled over the matter for but a moment; for a flock of sheep that lay strewn about chewing their cuds in contentment, startled up, and after a trembling retreat, nosed closer and cautiously toward them.

"I gueth the end of the world ith a long way off," sobbed the tearful Fanfinx.

"I don't see it anywhere," Gee-Boy was forced to admit.

The little maid's woe softened to a red-

eyed silence, which her loyal knight and true did not know how to break. At last she said,—

"Tjee-Boy, don't you think we'd better thay 'Now I lay me'?"

"Pooh!" quoth the valiant one. "Who's afraid?"

"Tjee-Boy, I wanth to go home."

"And let the peddler get you?"

"Oh, no, no; but, oh Tjee-Boy, I doth want to go home; an'—oh, Tjee-Boy, look at the little theep in front; it'th got a bell on, an' it lookth tjuth like the minithter'th wife."

Gee-Boy laughed aloud; it was very true, and the lady's name (little lack of echo here between sound and sense!) was Mrs. Lamb, as before observed. A happy event! In two minutes he and Fanfinx were playing church under the chinquapin and the persimmon, while Mrs. Lamb, surrounded by her brethren and sisters, listened with all the interest the two youngsters bestowed on her eloquent husband on Sundays. The service was begun with song by a most

heavenly choir (Fanfinx), than whom none could discourse more eloquent music; and there was no falling into pitfalls of absurdities such as the real people of the Lord fell into, when they sang, "We're going home to-morrow," and then went home the same day. With an air that was a most becoming union of pious devotion and operatic affectation, they (Fanfinx) warbled,—

"There ith a gate; there standth a tjar,
And through ith port holeth sthreaming,
Ta-ta, ta-tum, ta-too, ti-gar,
Ta-too, ta-tum, ta-dreaming"

(she never could understand the third and fourth lines), while the pastor (Gee-Boy) stood with the tips of his fingers sanctimoniously touching each other, and with eyes steadily and holily piercing the blue firmament and the leaves of the chinquapin. The hymn reached its dying fall—piously, devotionally; and the sermon began. Now let Wesley, Asbury, and Simpson hide their diminished heads.

No, the discourse cannot be given here; for neither the chinquapin, nor the persimmon, nor yet Mrs. Lamb, from all of whom came faint and blurred echoes to the historian, could recall an entire sentence of it; a masterly sermon nevertheless; and it was common opinion that Gee-Boy spoke as no mortal ever dared to speak before. The simple children of nature who listened were deeply moved by the unselfishness of his admonitions—unselfish because the preacher frankly said they were not for himself; otherwise why should he give them away? And the congregation listened, and made no threats to withhold their quarterage or to send a committee of the brethren to conference "to tell the bishop there had better be a change."

But what Gee-Boy said sank into insignificance when compared with what he did not say. Our best thoughts are those we have not uttered; our best books are those we have not written, and cannot write. (The chronicler vouches for this, having seen it

in a book.) And, too, the young divine knew what his elders did not know—that there are things no earth-born simple Simon should attempt to say. There has been but one other who ever reached this mountain-top of wisdom—she a woman, obscure but brilliant, who, when the savants were burdening the magazines with such themes as "Why I am a Methodist," "Why I am a Presbyterian," and "Why I am an Atheist," wrote her own mind on "Why I am an Agnostic"; and the whole essay consisted in this one sentence of Socratic sapience, "Because, in using the mouth as an organ of speech, the race has presumed." (Note: the article was declined.)

But alas! the world has ever abused its wisest teachers. Just as Gee-Boy was rounding his last and most eloquent period, the flock suddenly divided, and a strange beast appeared, and a passing ugly beast to look upon. It was like a sheep, but larger; it had a wicked look in its eyes, and just in front of each ear it had an enormous crumply-

skinned corkscrew. It stamped the earth, thus giving the challenge to battle.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Fanfinx, faintly.

Gee-Boy was slowly taking off his coat.

"What ith it, Tjee-Boy?" asked the little maiden, lifting her skirts to run.

"Be still, Fanfinx; it's a Dilemma; and I am going to take it by the horns."

Gee-Boy threw his coat to the ground with a heroic swing. "Come on," he shouted, making a rush.

"Ba-a-a," quoth the Dilemma, its voice tremulous with emotion. It lowered its head, made a counter rush; and the battle was on.

No—it was off. The beast, by its habit, which was an evil habit and a parlous, unsanctioned by the rules of modern warfare, lowered its head as it rushed, and took its adversary a mighty thump in his middle.

Never had the world seemed to Gee-Boy so like a world of phantoms, so filled with fleeting hallucinations, so peopled with wraiths and shadows; it swam and twirled about him and about itself with numberless

convolutions and turbinations; it was a vast Maelstrom, and he was its vortex. He heard, dreamily, a voice shouting "Fanfinx," and he thought it must be the Dilemma calling. But Fanfinx had gone a-kally-whoopin' for the fence, and heard it not. Then there was a swirl of wild words that seemed far away, words that came up from the abyss beyond the edge of the world, perhaps, into which he might be falling.

Suddenly the blur grew thicker, a spasm passed through him, and the solid world came back with a rush. There were the thin branches above him, and the sheep huddled at a distance, and the Dilemma cropping the grass watchfully near by.

Gee-Boy made a sudden leap and a dash. The beast plunged after; but its fleeing enemy twirled around the chinquapin, made a rush for the persimmon, and shinned up it—swiftly, but with no more grace than a Brahma rooster jumping up to pick the top berry on a gooseberry bush. Safely perched on the lowest branch, he took a little ease

and had his reflection. The world was uncommonly bluxy, and no mistake: everything conspired to keep him from doing what he desired; it was an evil world, and a delusion.

"Tjee-Boy," cried a still small voice.

It was Fanfinx on the fence.

"Tjee-Boy, thay 'Now I lay me'."

"Pooh!" returned Gee-Boy, tenderly rubbing his stomach; and the Dilemma butted the tree beneath him.

Fanfinx blubbered on the fence for a time, then dropped off on the safe side, and disappeared over the hill.

"Just like a woman," muttered Gee-Boy; for that's the way it always looks to a man up a tree. He straddled the limb, rested his back against the trunk, and tried to whistle "How tedious and tasteless the hours," but couldn't until he had taken a bite of a green persimmon. The tune was not a merry one, and it did not cheer the lonely watcher. The sheep cropped the grass; the beast stood guard below; a locust sang his long

strident song in the chinquapin, and shot away in a low curve to sing in another tree; a katydid cut the summer silence above; the sun rested his chin on the knob on the afternoon side, grinned a moment, and dipped; and Gee-Boy wished Potchy would come and show him how to take a Dilemma by the horns. Was it a thing that could be learned only by doing?

"Well, I'll be dog gone!" exclaimed the Julep-Devil, leaning his elbows on the fence. "That durned ram's got him treed. Low Dutch never done a better job on a coon."

A short tale to make, the Julep-Devil routed the Dilemma with a neck-yoke he chanced to be carrying, pulled Gee-Boy down by the legs, and led him home.

"The jedge'd better do sumpin' with that youngster," he said that night to a crony, as his pipe bubbled reflectively; "he ain't right bright; there's sumpin' wrong here (tapping his forehead); the cogs slip, I'm thinkin'—makin' all them highfalutin names and doin' all them things he didn't ought

to do. Went off on a lark to the edge of the world; wandered miles, maybe, an' wound up in the doctor's pasture just over the knob, back of the stable; got knocked galley-west by Bates's ram that had butted a rail outen the fence. I come acrost him by chanct, an' brought him home 'th his gal-luses busted. 'Fore he went away he left a note on the door tellin' his maw the key was under the step. She come back after a right smart spell, an' found a tramp had got in an' filled up his empty outen all the pie an' kraut they was fer supper. Why, that there boy's mental pro-cesses air as crooked as a dog's hind legs; ain't they, Dutch? (A nudge.) Did you ever see his gran'mother? Well, she was that-a-way. It was—let me see; I disremember just when it was—'bout sixteen year back come next autumn, I reckon. She went about with her eyes on fire, mutterin' to herself. Don't yuh know when yuh go down to the river in the mornin' early, before sun-up, when the mist is risin' in curls, an' yuh look ahead,

cautious-like, starin' at sumpin' yuh don't see? Well, that's the way she done. I see her a heap o' times. Onct, out by the ellum, at the eend o' the house, I see her put her hand to her head, an' say, 'Lost, lost!'—just like that, sad an' desp'rate. Well, well! The youngster favours her. He'll come to some queer eend—I don't know whut, but some queer eend. God knows, God knows!"

The Julep-Devil indulged himself in a period of gloomy reflection on the possible destiny of the house of Brown, saying at its end, "I been feelin' donsy all day; I reckon you'd better go take a julep with me; no mint julep never killed no man."

IV

THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED

HAVING swallowed a watermelon seed, and being fearful that a long vine would grow out of his throat (so local tradition warned), Gee-Boy felt the call to prayer. When the impulse struck him, he was coming home from school at a swinging trot, singing a little song, which ran,—

"Did you ee-ver, i-ver, o-ver,
In your leef, lofe, life,
See the dee-vil, di-vil, do-vil
And his weef, wofe, wife?"

Now he had reached the third word in the third line, when the profanity of the jingle occurred to him with crushing force; and, clipping the Stygian name suddenly, he stopped, leaned his head against a convenient butcher shop, and said, "Now I lay

me," a version revised by himself. After this manner shall ye pray, said he,—

> "Now I lay me down to sleep,
> I pray the Lord my soul to take;
> If I should die before I wake,
> I pray the Lord my soul to keep,"

which was good riddance of an obvious incongruity. To be sure, he was aware of the absurdity of saying "Now I lay me," when he was only leaning his head against a butcher shop, but he intended the prayer only as a temporary counteraction to the rime of the "dee-vil," and thought it would serve until he could make a more serious effort.

But how to pray! Some prayers remained unanswered, a little reminiscence whispered. Dr. Grubbs, Fanfinx's father, had told Potchy he once had treated an old blind beggar of a mortal illness—a beggar old enough and burdensome enough to die; with every dose the humane practitioner had prayed God to take the old man unto himself. "But he got well," said the doctor, laughing.

"Can it be that pills are more potent than prayer?" Offsetting this was an experience of Gee-Boy's own—a wild, night experience; tempest and fire, and clanging engines in the streets below; and on the knob his own little white-robed figure in supplication at his bedside. Reflecting on the success of his own petition, he convicted the doctor of a lack of faith.

"All you need is as much faith as a mustard seed," said he to Fanfinx, as they gathered their crops under Pimpernock, "and you can make a mountain throw itself into the sea."

"But we hathn't got any mountain."

"Then we can take a knob."

"Nor any thea, neither."

"Well, we can use the river; it's just the same."

Fanfinx began to cry. "I don't want the riffer filled up."

"Cry-baby," returned Gee-Boy, angrily. "You haven't got any tehoojety. We can use the crick, then."

Fanfinx cheered up. "Leth do it."

"All right; an' nen I'll fix the watermelon vine all right. What knob shall we take?"

"The one where the Dilemma wath."

A slight timidity numbed Gee-Boy for a moment; he had never before approached the Lord save in the quiet of his own chamber or in the sombre church, and he was ignorant of the primeval sanctity of the temple of the moment—the orchard. Prayer here seemed bold and unreverential, until he was reassured by one of the simplest creatures of nature—a duck wading in a yellow puddle in the barnyard across the fence; she dipped her bill into the mud, ploughed it along an inch or two, gobbled something, and raised her thankful head toward Heaven. Gee-Boy plunged.

"O Lord, we know all thy tender mercies. Please chuck the knob beyond the chinquapin and the persimmon into the crick. Amen."

"That'll fetch it," he said, brushing the dirt from his knees. "Come quick, Fanfinx; let's see how it looks."

They skurried through the orchard, scaled the stake and rider fence, and fled down the hill into a little gully with sides of yellow clay and a bottom of gravel. At the end they ran through a bunch of hickory and pignuts, and came abruptly upon the creek.

Gee-Boy stopped and took in the scene in a jiffy. He looked blank. There was the stream, as placid as ever, save where it sparkled over a riffle and eddied about a half-sunken log. "It isn't come yet, Fanfinx," he said, disconsolately. "We'll have to wait, I reckon."

Fanfinx, less patient, observed that the knob might be beyond the bend, nearer the river. "You didn't tell the Lord where to throw it in," she explained.

"That's so, I didn't," Gee-Boy replied, reflectively; "it was very careless of me. We've got to go 'round, I guess; but"——

It was a long circuit, and through brier patches and a wheat field, and over a branch too deep to wade. Gee-Boy paused.

"I tell you what, Fanfinx," he said, with

the impetuous energy of a new thought, "it's too far 'round; I'm goin' to walk across the crick—right on the water."

"Oh, oh! You'll get drownded."

Gee-Boy knit his forehead, and twisted impatiently. "You don't understand, Fanfinx. Peter sunk because he didn't have faith; he thought he could do it all by himself."

The little maid was silenced. She put the corner of her apron into her mouth and chewed it.

There was a flat place in the bank down the stream a bit—about as far as a bubble floats while you are waiting for your cork to bob on a day when the fish bite well; it looked smooth and shiny, and it was on a level with deep water. "It will be a good place to get a running start from," said Gee-Boy to himself.

He slid down the steep bank before him, climbed over a fallen tree, and felt the gravel crunching beneath his feet. Then he took a run for the flat shiny place. At the first fall of his foot, the sole of his shoe sunk

its thickness into the soft surface; and by the time he reached the creek's edge, he was floundering ankle deep in a thick sticky substance. But if he could gain the water he would be safe; he felt sure of that; so he plunged hard. His feet came up reluctantly from the water-soaked sand, which closed after them with a chugging sound, and in a second or two he had planted them on the firm floor of water.

Firm? Floor? No, neither. His feet went down until his knees were covered, and beneath was the treacherous yielding stuff that pulled at him. By a tug so lusty that it seemed to burst his thews and sinews, he pulled his right leg up only to find his left sinking lower. He glanced anxiously around, and wished the Julep-Devil were there. Yet of what avail would that be? This useful person had gone mysteriously lame; a bone in his leg, he had explained with a face painfully serious, was the cause.

Gee-Boy was sinking deeper. Now he could withdraw neither foot; the water about

him was severely calm, the yielding stuff beneath slow and patient, and the tracks on the sand were slowly smoothing themselves over.

Fanfinx fluttered along the high banks, and shouted to him to get a little more faith. But he shot at her a look of scorn; already he had tried to pray; it had flashed upon him that this was a trial of facts, not of faith.

Once more he made a desperate struggle, and only sank deeper. He was up to his thighs now.

At the instant a killing thought pierced him. "Fanfinx," he shouted, "I know what it is; it's a quicksand—the one the roan colt was lost in. Run; bring the Julep-Devil. Run, Fanfinx, run."

There was a flicker of short draperies among the pignuts and the hickories, and Gee-Boy was alone, the two worlds he lived in sadly mixed.

Alone! It was a good word. Better than any he had ever coined. As he thought of

it, it dragged its slow sonorous length through his mind. The riffles up stream murmured sweetly and cruelly in his ears; the water came relentlessly higher about him, to his waist. A jay-bird perched in a thorn tree a few feet away, and perked its saucy head at him. A kingfisher shot past and made a sudden dive into the water down stream. And the water—his thoughts could not long stray from this—seemed so calm, so imperturbed, yet so firm in its murderous malevolence. Again he made a Herculean struggle, only to sink deeper. He was by this time sunk nearly to his arm-pits. For about twenty heart-throbs he remained silent, then waved frantically to and fro, like a snag in swift water, and began to cry. But the ripples ran away from him with never an offer of help, and he stopped his tears from the mere hopelessness of them, and was calm. Gee-Boy had encountered the Infinite and its immutable Law, and it was but natural that he should think about it there in the silence—seriously.

God and his ways! And death! These filled his being with darting thoughts. He had had a flash vision of these subjects not long before, walking on the river's edge with Potchy and Monna, strutting mannishly along with a silk hat (cut down from Potchy's castaway), when the bank crumbled and would have let him down, had it not been for the clutch of a fatherly hand which saved him, but jarred the hat into the stream. The shudder he felt when the thought of what might have happened flashed over him, was an ever unwelcome remembrance; but the quick experience had revealed to him nothing of Death. Now he knew it is a quicksand—a slow relentless quicksand—that brings its victim face to face with a great Something unknowable to man until his mortality has been swallowed up in immortality. And God? A vast bird with sheltering wings, Gee-Boy had once thought him; and then a monster to be feared—a hunchback monster with projecting eyes, a skin of iron colour, and a

bludgeon in his knotted hand. Finally there came a kinder picture, mother-given, of a benign-faced old man, who protected and loved his people.

But was it protection to allow his faithful ones to fall into quicksands? Why did not God save him? Then came the first—and the inevitable—doubt. *Could* God save him? Might it not be that an impossibility is as impossible to God as to man? It was the more likely in the light of a past experience of his own. When Potchy once told him that God made light and darkness, he blew out the candle, lit it again, and said he was a god; but he could not make it burn a third time for lack of matches. Could God himself—be it spoken reverently—run out of matches? It was a thought of despair, and he strained his ears for a sound of the Julep-Devil's limp down the hill and along the yellow gully; but there was only the merry voice of the riffles, the slow swirl of the water around the log, the leap of a fish, and the chirrup of the crickets in the grass.

Gee-Boy now thought old thoughts with fearful rapidity; old brain paths felt anew the old impulses darting through their long spirals. Would the world come to an end when he was dead? And would he see Potchy's and Monna's souls in Heaven? They would look very funny, he feared, for there came an early impression (Heaven only knows where he got it!) that the soul is a brown substance about the size of a loaf of bread, and that in the starry mansions they are all packed away in decorous rows. These, and more; swift thoughts, mind, that take too long in the telling.

The water and the sand were pressing against his breast now, and his breath came hard. Heaven lay close about him. The trees that shadowed the stream shook in a little breeze. To Gee-Boy the sound was a rustling of wings. Again the winged impressions, old and new!—he found himself pitying the little German children who died; American was doubtless the language of Heaven. A sudden revulsion of feeling

brought bitterness into his heart; he did not want to die. He had been told by people old enough to know that God is good; it seemed to him a thesis not proven; and he wondered whether grown-up people actually knew all they pretended to know. Three impressions that the Dilemma episode made on him suddenly took firm lodgment in his mind—that things are not what they seem, that they must always be "just so," and that something unseen made it impossible for him to do the things he most wanted to do.

Thoughts of home rushed upon him—the house perched upon the knob overlooking the town, the broad river, the steamboats, and the city beyond. In his strained consciousness he heard the pines sighing, saw Potchy reading his paper in the hickory chair on the long porch, and heard Monna in the sitting-room singing, "Roll on, Silver Moon," to the accompaniment of the old melodeon, above which hung John Wesley, with his womanly face, his white clerical

cravat hanging down over his black vestment, and his lily-and-rose hands poised in a most ladylike manner over the Holy Writ. In a corner was a what-not—a succession of three-sided shelves suspended in a pyramid of green cords, holding such primeval treasure as a basket of alum crystallised about woven strings, a candy dog, and an elephant made of brown cloth. There, too, were the family ambrotypes; set in little cases of rubber, the pictures themselves surrounded by little frames of ornamented brass or copper. One especially dear was that of Monna, her raven hair parted in the middle and combed smoothly down over her ears save for a little curl that escaped and hung over her white forehead; round neck and shoulders relieved by a black necklace; low-cut dress of jettest silk; short sleeves ending in white under-sleeves; black bracelets of beads on the wrists; hands white and graceful. There was, too, the great fireplace that had burned a forest behind the brass andirons brought from

Maryland when all Hoosierdom was a leafy wilderness. How could he leave these things —these pictures of the instant, and gone ere seen?

But endurance could endure no longer. The heft of tons was on his breast; his arms were numb; the water had reached his neck. His brain teemed, but his ideas had no more coherence than rain-drops dripping from the eaves. His weighted heart throbbed a death march. All would soon be over; his little life would go out in pain and struggle. A smoke suddenly filmed the creek, the trees, the sky; sparks danced through it; strange sounds pinged his ears; he seemed to hear Potchy's big voice, the Julep-Devil's limp, and the puffing of Dr. Grubbs, who was ever fat and scant of breath; but it could be nothing but the fancy that comes from desire. The smoke thickened; the sounds died as the woods are hushed at evening; and Gee-Boy trembled dreamily on the brink of the unknown.

Booby, booby! The stars are far away,

and the earth is near; and yet you will wander off to the unfirm ground between.

The Julep-Devil sat down on the edge of the water-trough behind the barn, straightened out the leg that had the bone in it, gave Low Dutch a warning nudge with his other foot, lit his pipe with the air of one that deserves his luxury, and proceeded to explain the affair to one of his cronies—to explain with a bigotry too great, a soul too practical and unsympathetic to make a fair judgment of Gee-Boy's vagaries possible; he himself had never run after any will-o'-the-wisp. Thus he spoke, with occasional aid of the Pslangist,—

"It's whut I've pré-dicted all the while; that child is plum daffy, and he'll die with his boots on. I tell yuh, I know beans when the bag's open wide enough. He's peert, though, if that was any goterion to cry by; but, by hokey! he ain't got no sense 'bout common things. Yuh don't have to be no great shakes to know 'at a feller kin know

a heap outen school-books, an' still not know enough to come in when it rains. You know that yourself, Eddie, an' so does Low Dutch (another nudge). This world ain't whut that boy thinks it is—not by a jug full. You ain't heerd about it? Well, it stirred us up right smart. It was day before yistiddy, 'bout an hour before the cows come home. The doctor's little girl (you know he cain't no more do 'thout her 'n a livery stable kin do 'thout a goat; I reckon they'll marry sometime—if he lives; God knows!) —the little girl, I say, come runnin' up the hill beyond the orchard 'bout two-forty on a plank road, climbed the fence mighty nigh skeered inter kiniption fits, an' squealed out 'at Gee-Boy was a-drowndin' in the crick. Well, me an' the ole man an' Doc run there an' found the little cuss stuck in the quicksand where we lost the roan colt in the Spring; he was up to his neck, an' dreamy. I tell yuh whut, it was mighty nigh a croak with him. We laid down a lot of rails an' pried him out o' the chuggy

sand, an' toted him home. He come to after a spell, an' looked 'round. Blamed if I could tell whether he keered much er not. 'Peared like he was a-sayin' to hisself, 'O Death, where is thy stinger?' Didn't tell yuh how he come to get stuck in the sand? Oh, he was tryin' to walk on the water like —like—well now, I disremember who it was; some Bible feller, back in the days when some things could be done as well as others; Jonah, mebbe. Any way, the boy's daft, clean daft; an' he'll die with his boots on er die in the 'sylum. Will you have a julep? I've got some fresh mint. No mint julep never killed no man."

When Gee-Boy was able to leave his bed and roam about the all too-substantial world, the Julep-Devil looked at him with an eye of quizzical humour, and would have spoken had not the boy stared at him in defiance. Gee-Boy had no pearls to cast before him, and turned away. Yet the look sank into his soul and filled him with bitterness.

Wormwood! Wormwood!

V

THE FLIGHT OF PILATE

AS infancy retreated into the rear perspective and the earlier years of boyhood occupied the foreground of his life, Gee-Boy gained powers of discrimination as to the relative importance of the various puzzles of existence. He concerned himself no more with the inability of fish to assume an attitude of prayer. If they could not, it was their misfortune, and no concern of his. He cared not a copper whether Adam was filled with sand at the creation, nor whether God hurt the chicks when he thrust the feathers in. He had tacitly yielded, too, to the scientific view of the earth's shape and bothered himself no more with the end of the world—at least in so far as end meant edge. But the power of ripening years showed the question of end in the sense of purpose to be a matter of primal moment, and one to be pondered over.

Thus Gee-Boy's discriminative mental processes at this time—yet exceeding crude and boyish, neither coherent nor logical; afterward formulated retrospectively—led him inevitably to the old questions, "What makes us born? How do we do it? What are we born for?" It was not the origin of the soul that bothered him; that is easy to any spirit like his, whose tendency is naturally starward. Indeed, he too often felt an uneasy fear that all things were alive; a fear that struck him first with respect to the gate-spring, which had been on a tension for a whole morning when sand and brick were being wheel-barrowed through for a new addition to the kitchen. What if the spring could feel? Into the lifeless tensioned metal he projected past agony of his own on a day when he had been pinioned with a bent back in a manger into which he had fallen from the hay-loft, and had been taken out fainting. If the gate-spring could feel! Many a time thereafter he had climbed the fence out of sheer pity of the poor steel spiral.

It was easy, then, indeed unavoidable, to believe in soul; but whence the body? Perfectly natural questions to a thinking boy! —just as, Who was the first dog? and, How did he come to be? are doubtless inevitable queries to the philosophic dog-mind. Such answers as, God made us, The doctor brought us, he confronted with a pouting, frowning face; too well he saw the reluctance of the replies, the pitiable evasion in drooping eye and affected composure. A trying time for parent and child, and one when judgment usually takes flight and leaves the fight to delicacy!

In Gee-Boy's lofty isolation on the knob-top he was at times sought out by lads from the town, who climbed the shaggy sides of the great hill at the steepest places, usually with some military pretence or other, as the Montcalm episode at Quebec. Once in the pasture above, with their host they would roll small boulders to the edge, send them over, and watch the path they made in their rush, bound and roar through crack-

ing brush and splitting trees. They killed a heifer at the sport once. But no matter. Something came of it all. For Gee-Boy, on one fateful day, resting with his friends after sending an unusually large stone on its destructive descent, propounded the much-evaded questions. It was behind the barn—proper place for the revelation of mysteries! "Huh!" exclaimed the biggest boy, in contempt, "don't you know?" This biggest boy was reputed bad, and deserved the repute. Now be it known that a big bad boy, carrion-wise, and a few small boys, innocent, and inclined to hero-worship, assembled within the privacy of that mischief-brewing region behind the barn, make a coalescence for evil.

In the whispered communication of the next half-hour, Gee-Boy was infected with the grossness of the flesh; scandal against the race of fathers and mothers was buzzed into his ear; weeds were sown in his fertile mind, and much Rabelaisan compost was scattered broadcast, with a dung-fork, to make them

ranker. He had eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and was as God, knowing good from evil. The experience nearly unhitched him from his star.

His first feeling was the necessity of secrecy. There was now a screen of silence between him and the two whose child he was. He could no longer question them with honest interest. He had gained knowledge; knowledge imposed a mute retirement into himself; like God again, he was prone to keep the secrets of the Infinite.

A second feeling, that grossness had no proper place in the scheme of things, led him into a poorly defined belief that in the act of creation the divine hand may not always have done the best thing. Perhaps God had not made the most of his opportunities. It was a daring reflection, had Gee-Boy known it; but the profoundest regret filled him, to the exclusion of all fear.

A day or two of heavy-eyed pondering on these matters exhausted Gee-Boy in part, and allowed him to return to the original

questions, when it occurred to him that "What are we born for?" had not been answered. Now, what is all this fuss about? What is the use of so much humdrum living? Why so much rising and going to bed? Why so much hewing of wood and drawing of water? All one's life one eats, sleeps, feeds the pigs, and finally lies down, dies, and is carted away. What is the end of all this doing and undoing? The answer did not reveal itself to Gee-Boy; he knew it was useless to ask Potchy and Monna, and he was afraid to ask the boys behind the barn.

Lo, how those who hunger and thirst after knowledge are filled! "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to praise him all the days of our lives forever," was the somewhat unritualistic answer. If this were true, as the Sunday-school teacher had averred—a sweet young miss she was; flounced and beaded; fanned with a turkey wing, and silken-mitted; the adored of a dozen giggling youngsters—then it fell to her to explain why such a wide neglect of all such

glorification. For, "My pa don't glorify God," piped up a small voice; "he's first mate on the *Antelope*, and he cusses the niggers." "He, he, he!" chuckled the dozen, and put their hands over their mouths—all but the solemn-eyed searcher after Truth.

The teacher smiled with eyes and lips from out of her black bonnet. "You must tell your pa," she said, "that God made us all, and that we should praise him. You should tell him, too, that he should n't swear."

"Nope," said the boy; "he'd lick me."

This irrelevant reply fell upon one pair of deaf ears—their owner's shallow understanding was hurt by a seeming untruth. "*Did* God make us?" came the question, low-toned and grave.

"Why, yes, Turner, he made us all. He made the world. He made everything that is—the mountains, the sea, the river, the sky; and he can make anything he wishes."

"Could he make a rock?"

"Certainly."

"Could he make a rock so big that us

boys could n't roll it to the edge of the knob?"

"Why, of course; he could do it just as quick as that." And the teacher snapped her pretty silken-mitted fingers.

"Could he make a rock so big that our horses could n't drag it to the edge of the knob?"

"Of course—in a single second."

"Could he make a rock so big that all the horses in the world could n't budge it?"

"Yes, Turner, just as easy as the others."

"Well,"—and the questioner braced himself for a final tug at obstreperous Truth—"could he make a rock so big that he could n't move it himself?"

The teacher's poor little heart stood still; the red blood dropped from her face and dammed itself up in her full pulsing breast. Her eyes looked wide and frightened within her bonnet. "Why, Turner, how—how *could* you?" she faltered, helplessly.

"I wanted to know," Gee-Boy answered, hopelessly.

"But how could you ask such a wicked, wicked question?"

"Well," complained the boy, "when I ask questions, either they don't know, or they don't tell me the truth. And you say it's wicked to ask. What's the use of asking? I wish I was a Presbyterian, and didn't have to come here ever again."

The sweet little teacher, stricken with the consciousness of duty poorly done, gave way to tears—tears that moistened her pale cheeks all through the church service, after Sunday-school. Perhaps it was all a judgment sent against her for her sinful finery. She had been warned. Gee-Boy watched her from the family pew, as she sat in the Amen corner with many less lovely but more strict sisters in Israel, her head bowed, her lips moving in prayer, her hands clasped. He protested against the consciousness of wickedness within him; he was but a humble searcher after Truth, and deserved no barbed conscience.

The blind had led the blind, and the dirt

of the ditch smeared them both. Nor was there a helpful hand to raise them out of the hopeless mire.

As the depressed Gee-Boy moped inwardly, words from the unheeded pulpit began to drift sluggishly into his mind, and then suddenly to flow in like an undammed torrent.

"I saw her here in the Sunday-school," said the preacher, "just on the eve of giving her heart to God. But one more dance! she said, and then her life would be given to the service of the Master. The dance came and she went. The next day she was sick; the next worse; the next dead—oh, my friends, sent to eternal damnation for the sin of dance"——

There was considerable of a clatter in the judge's pew. It seemed that vigorous young copper-toed boots had kicked the seat in front, or had come down ungently on the uncarpeted floor; perhaps both. While there was some doubt as to this unimportant detail, it was asserted, and in no wise discredited, that four incisive words were heard

from the same seat—"I don't believe it." Just as plain as that.

Now, you who listen respectfully and silently to the word of God as it flows from authoritative lips, you who love the hysterics of religion rather than its poetry, can you sufficiently condemn such defiance? Neither could they of the morning service. Craned necks, eyes strained in their sockets with much twisting, neck-cloths awry—such were the signs of curiosity and indignation. The word of God suddenly ceased in evident confusion, faltered, and refused to flow again, even spasmodically, until Gee-Boy, to the petrifaction of his parents, arose and stalked down the aisle and out of the church; then the preacher wiped his damp brow, and struggled vainly for a time to breathe life into a dead inspiration.

There was a buzz from little swarms throughout the church when the final Amen was heard—a buzz followed by the wagging of wise fingers and polls grown gray in wrestling with the spirit. "I tell yuh whut,"

might have been heard, "that boy talks scandalous; he's an element that—well, have yuh heerd whut he ast his teacher this mornin'? He's a bad element—mark my word."

If the expression on the faces of Judge Brown and his wife had given room for belief that they were friendly to heterodoxy, they would have been told their duty then and there. But the expedition with which they left the church—an expedition restrained indeed by an evident severity and gravity—left no doubt among the brothers and sisters as to their having the proper conception of their Christian obligation toward their blasphemous son.

When Potchy and Monna reached the carriage, the Julep-Devil sat alone on the front seat; Gee-Boy was not sighted until, at the edge of the town, they saw him, a distant speck, a mere fly, climbing the last stretch of yellow road that threaded the knob-side. At that moment he was brooding over his self-expulsion from the church. At once

Adam and the Angel of the Flaming Sword, he had driven himself from Paradise and had shut the clanging gates behind him. Time had been, and not long slipped into the past, when he had felt securely comfortable to think how other people would be damned. What a gratifying sight from the battlements of Heaven! And now! Why, he was even an "element," though the knowledge of this sad condition had not reached him. In his distress a thought came to him that he had formerly—with the greatest complacency—with regard to Tom Hook; if he was to be damned, was it not better not to have been born? And the young girl the preacher had spoken of!—Gee-Boy had known her well—would it not have been better had she not taken the chances of coming into the world?

From which we may infer that Gee-Boy was not so strong after all in the disbelief that had burst from him in church. We are told that the devils believe and tremble. So with Gee-Boy in his momentary reaction. Yet it was an unhappy lot, to be born with a

desire to sin and to be punished for sinning. He remembered, too, that a former Sunday-school lesson had revealed questionable compulsion of Pharaoh, who had been afflicted with plagues because his heart was hardened against the children of Israel; but both sin and penalty had come from Jehovah, that he might show his power and his might, and that the Egyptians might know he was the Lord. Unhappy Fate, to be thus beset! If it were all true, he could not forgive the Lord for his manifold transgressions. But he had the saving doubt.

Gee-Boy's thoughts were somewhat abstracted from this sceptical consideration of God's powers and purposes by an episode wholly earthly in its character—an impromptu dramatic action (strictly in observance of the unities), which was usually staged in the stable, and, according to family tradition, was corrective of moral shortcomings. At such times the boy practised all the self-restraint demanded by the canons of the strictest art; there was no outcry, no such

alarm as doubtless announced the fall of Ilium, or followed daun Russel the fox, as he fled with Chauntecleer from the povre widwe and her doghtren two—only a writhing of the face and a contortion of the body, with spasmodic attempts at making a rear guard with the hands; all being followed by a prayerful look of relief when the thing ended. But on this occasion Gee-Boy seemed preoccupied, and did justice neither to the occasion nor to himself. He seemed to forget all those little signs of restrained emotion which he had formerly shown with admirable skill under stress of the present circumstances. When the curtain fell (so to speak; it was not exactly a curtain, nor did it fall at the *end* of the performance), he merely looked up and asked,—

"Potchy, *did* God send Anna Marshall to hell for dancing?"

"My son," said the judge, with signs of failing gravity, "I don't know."

"Well, does the *preacher* know?"

"I don't know."

"Well, who *does* know?"

"I don't know."

Gee-Boy looked despairful and hopeless. The judge, to hide some fleeting emotion, turned quickly, put the strap up on the rafter and strode out, even forgetting the usual words of love and admonition.

"The ole man didn't whup as hard as ordinary," said the Julep-Devil. He sat on the water-trough beside the stable; and his pipe bubbled contentedly.

It was a forlorn hope to ask this convivial hostler anything, but Gee-Boy ventured. "Does God do all the things they say he does?"

The pipe ceased bubbling. "Whut?" asked its owner, in the faintness of extreme amazement.

"Does God do all the things they say he does?" Gee-Boy emphasised every word.

Tom Hook, the Julep-Devil, gazed a moment in silence; then set his pipe to bubbling deliberatively; at last he answered with simple finality, "That's whut they say."

Here Gee-Boy became the victim of a strange wild seizure—a whirl of all emotions induced by defeat; the maddest exasperation in the vortex. He spun about, and reeled, and stamped his foot, and shouted out, "Darn! Darn!—everybody, I say—everybody!"

"Well, I'll be dog gone!" exclaimed the Julep-Devil, with subdued astonishment, as Gee-Boy staggered away. Then a pause, and a judicial dismissal of the affair as he knocked the ashes from his pipe. "That kid's daffy; no words cain't do him injustice."

As for the unfortunate one himself, he was seen no more that day. Dinnerless, supperless, but for an ear of corn—good resistance for his grinders—he remained in a nook known only to himself—a recess between rocks hidden by a low growth of evergreens on the south side of the knob, and half-way down its side; reached only by a narrow precipitous path obstructed by stones and projecting roots. Here he could look almost straight down over a ledge of stone for a hundred

feet; a few miles to his left the yellow river disappeared in the white of its rapids and the smoke of the city; to his right its great bend melted into the faint purple of mellow distance; on its smooth current the steamboats, far and near, moved in their stately fashion, bellowing their warnings, leaving long paths behind them in the pathless water, making for the wharves below, where a dozen of their kind rested from their labours.

Gee-Boy's mind was racked long and fiercely before the softening effect of this spread-out picture wrought its will upon him, and his grief at the limitations of divine power and divine morality as revealed in the history of the day—which might well shake so philosophical an intellect—had ceased to fill him with active misery. Before he reached a state of quiescence, and resignation in ignorance, he thought bitter things. Were we born to glorify God? If so, why do we do so little of it? Were we born to be damned eternally for peccadillos? If so—but no degree of euphemism would sufficiently soften Gee-Boy's

words to the ears of those who cry "Sacrilege," and "He blasphemeth," when confronted by the unanswerable question. They have been busy in times past with rack and screw. Let us respect them.

The utter defeats of the day wrought in Gee-Boy a hopelessness of finding out the Truth, and it became a habit with him thereafter, when anybody spoke positively about things no fool mortal can know, to turn away with a shrug, or with some such ejaculation as "I want to know!" or "Do tell!"—bad conduct, no doubt, and contemptuous; but the result of the defeat of an honest endeavour to find out whatsoever things are true. If you are satisfied with less reason than he, if you are nearer to the Unknowable than he, why censure him?

The Biblical analogy, now, for an end; for all experience is old—old. Pilate had conducted himself in a similar unbecoming manner ages before—turned away with an impossible question for a jest; fled from an answer he thought could not be given.

The Flight of Pilate

"What is Truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews."

Be it appended that he said to them, "I find in him no fault at all." Those who crawl may read.

Which may be found, with much else of divinely tragic interest, and masterfully spoken, in the eighteenth chapter of the gospel commonly attributed to Saint John.

VI

THE BIRTH AND DEATH OF AUCHOPHET-MAN

WHEN Gee-Boy turned nine, sad things happened: an angular person from Illinois was elected president, the roar of cannon came up from Charleston, and the premonitory hush of war and death fell upon the land. Potchy's section of the State, in party caucus, had asked him to be candidate for governor; but there was another more able than he, as he knew, to guide her through perilous straits; and he had chosen to take part in the fight he knew would come. So the day came when his little family saw him ride away from the gate followed by his orderly, and disappear in the streets of the town. As the day waned, they saw him again on the levee at the head of a thousand horsemen; saw him and his regiment ferried

across the yellow river and disappear in the streets of the city. Then they heard the pine-trees sing a requiem; and the wife, who had given up for her country one of the two she loved best, found a woman's solace in tears. But in the heart of the little son a new strength welled up; and he said, "Don't cry, Monna; I will take care of you."

Such were his new duties that he went into the orchard and rechristened Pimpernock; now the giant became the Blugg-Blugg Tree, from the battles to be fought there; and Fanfinx was taught how fields were won.

The months in their anxious march brought news of victories and defeats, and Potchy had become a general. Joy was keen in Gee-Boy's breast, until two things happened. He had thought that no one could fail to love the man who was gallantly soldiering in Dixie; but a boy from the town came up one day, pressed his face against the pickets that guarded the house from the big road, and taunted him. "Your dad tried to be gov'nor, an' could n't, an' you think you're

smart. All he wants is to rob the rebs, an' have a nigger fer tuh fan 'im. Come outside, an' I'll lick you."

Gee-Boy's courage came in a tidal wave. Swearing a great oath he had made himself, he scaled the pickets, thrashed the copperhead black and blue, kicked him all the way down the knob, and came marching back to the eerie music of phantom fifes and drums. This would have been a triumph but for the sting left by the disparagement of the man who was in the hero business, and but for the ingratitude of Fanfinx, who, when he peeked through the fence and told her of the fight, suddenly announced that she would thereafter—from what motive is not clear, for Fanfinx was one of womankind—call her own papa Potchy. It was more than heart could bear, and Gee-Boy quite forgot himself. Potchy had often told him that no gentleman ever loses his temper, and especially in the presence of ladies; yet now the manikin cried and kicked the pickets in a shameful fury. All his failures to do what

he most wanted to do, had not pained him like this. "You stole the name," he screamed; "you stole my Potchy's name."

Fanfinx put the corner of her apron into her mouth, glanced sideways, twisted one way and another on her left foot, embarrassed, but stubborn. The more Gee-Boy stormed, the more firmly she was determined that from that day on her papa should be Potchy—Potchy in spite of the world. If Gee-Boy had invented the name for his own papa—what then? Did that give him the sole right to it? It was a free country, she thought. So she kept the corner of her apron in her mouth, twisted herself about, and was silent.

Now Gee-Boy's vials of wrath were empty in two minutes, and his howls softened into a querulous blubbering, and the blubbering died away into pathetic whimperings that would have melted any beating heart alive but that of the stubborn little Miss Fanfinx. "I'll not call you Fanfinx any more," he sobbed, "for Fanfinx means something nice,

an' now I'll never tell you what; but I'll call you Spinxy, an' that means The Little Girl that Steals Names; an' I'll not play with you any more, an' I'll not marry you when you grow up."

Fanfinx turned her nose up a trifle, and muttered that she didn't care; but her looks were sad, and she had told a lie. It is the woman's way. As for Gee-Boy, he wiped the tears from his face and turned aside; there could be no solace for him except in a little game he sometimes played beneath the Blugg-Blugg Tree.

This game was to fight a bloody fight. It was easy; anybody could play it; all you had to do was to pretend a lot of things, and by-and-by you forgot that all was pretending. Here by the Blugg-Blugg Tree was a great plain that reached from the gnarled bole of the oak itself to the orchard fence, and from the hedge to the first row of apple-trees—a plain fully fifty feet by thirty. Through the middle ran a great river, the raging Tuckanawdor, which rose in a moun-

tain range running snakewise from the tree to the hedge, and was capped with something resembling snow more or less eternal; both had sprung into being at the creative touch of Gee-Boy. Here a farm had been, but when Potchy marched away at the head of his regiment, the farm had suffered the ravaging touch of war; house, barn, and rick had been licked up by red tongues, and fences had gone down beneath the tread of men with muskets.

To-day, as Gee-Boy had suddenly determined, was to be the greatest battle ever fought; it needed smoke and flame and thunder to make an inspiration out of which was to come a new name for Potchy. So all the long summer afternoon the small boy toiled with his toy cannon and his regiments of blue and gray soldiers, who, to the vulgar eye, were nothing but coloured pegs of wood set into long sticks, but to him they were the most valiant troops, except Potchy's, that ever shouldered arms. Yet all travail was in vain; the armies could not be driven into a great fight; they tumbled

clumsily over the field or stood inertly stupid. One brigade of grays, driven to the fight, fell bodily, in perfect alignment, into the foaming Tuckanawdor, and floated across under the very guns of the foe. Neither the blue general, who galloped his white tin charger among the blue soldiers, nor the gray general, who coursed his black among the grays, could fire the troops to battle pitch. 'Twas pity, too; for General Potchy, the hero of a hundred fields of blood and death, waited impatiently behind the mountains with seven regiments of horse, ready to save the day if it should be lost to the blues. The failure was a sore trial to Gee-Boy. Thinking that perhaps the rations of himself and his armies were too rich, he resolved that there should be nothing for brexbux in the morning but hard-boiled humpty-dumpties; and when night fell he went to the house with hopes of the morrow, not deigning to notice, as he went, a little figure that stood watching him sadly and wistfully. Shame to her—to steal a name,

and for a man who was only a doctor, and stayed home from the war! But there must be a new name, one worthy a soldier and a hero who would not remain at home, even to be governor; and there must be days and weeks of toil, if need be, under the Blugg-Blugg Tree, and nights of watching and waiting until it should leap full-grown and armed from a little brain.

When Gee-Boy went that night to his half-story room in the roof, he robed himself for bed and curled up on a pillow in the deep seat in his dormer-window, which looked out upon the four pines with the mysterious voices, and down the long hill across the sleeping town to the great Ohio shining in the moon's light. Many a night, before going to sleep, he had sat there looking at the magic scene, and listening to the eternal whisper of the pines, wondering what they said; but their secret was still unrevealed. To-night he listened long, and at length fell into a light sleep and many dream-battles.

Now there is danger in the little game

that Gee-Boy played; that is, if you prefer to remain on the solid unghostly earth, where everything is just what it seems and the eyes do not go poking into those uncanny regions so near at hand and yet so far away, seeing things that are not there; for when you are all alone, and you think of just one thing and nothing else—think harder than you ever thought before, and forget all but this one thing, your soul may steal out of you a little way, and know very strange things, things close at hand, maybe, or far away; hidden things, not visible to the eyes of the body. A new and keener sanity comes upon you (perhaps, who knows?), in which you see the truth as if it were a part of you or you a part of it; the hallucinations of substance vanish; what, in truth, is, lies revealed. Else, where would Plotinus have got his ecstasy?

So Gee-Boy slumbered but fitfully, the effect of his loneliness and abstraction working within him, until that dark hour that prowlers say precedes the dawn, when he awoke

conscious of a new vision into things; the pines, shaken by a dank south wind, whispered wild rumours of carnage; his heart leaped at the utterance of tongues he knew.

They told of a dim night battle beyond the Kentucky hills; he heard, or thought he heard, the distant cannonading, and saw long lines of fire flash before his eyes. He looked and listened, and a strange inspiration seized him. He climbed out upon the roof, felt his way along the gutter and the shingles, whose edges were curled and moss-covered from long resistance to wind, sun, and rain, to the little square porch, from which he reached a limb of one of the pines, and in half a minute he was on the ground, standing ankle deep in the long brown spikes and cones the trees had dropped for seasons past. He listened a moment to the elfin voice above him, and then glided away to the Blugg-Blugg Tree; made, indeed, a stolen night march into a world not earthly.

Then the soldiers were aroused from their bivouac; they shook off Death's image,

and wrestled with Death himself; the Infinite touched them, and they were as gods. The blues charged to the Tuckanawdor; forded it; swam it; met the grays on the other shore, and fell upon them in their might. Gee-Boy saw and felt it all—the deadly grapple on the wet bank, the long lines of flame when the muskets volleyed, the pump and roar of artillery, the charge of cavalry, the death cries of mangled men and horses; and in his heart he exulted. And not more than when the blues were suddenly crowded back to the bank, the savage enemy before, the water behind; for the moment had come. Far to the left were the seven regiments, led by the hero of heroes, crossing the mountains in the half-light of the shrouded moon. Down they swept on the foe's flank, and the fight was a rout. In after years Gee-Boy could never think of this soundless, bloodless battle without a feeling of the touch of Infinity as he felt it then. Through it all he heard the pine trees sighing to him; there was something new in their voice that sent

a tremor shaking through his blood. When the hero changed the enemy's half-victory into a defeat, and cut his regiments into flying fragments, the name Gee-Boy wanted came—a very flash and roar of cannon in his brain. But he did not shout it out in triumph; he only stood in a daze, like one half-awakened from a dream, saying, "Auchophet-Man, Auchophet-Man," for it was the name of the dead. In the hush after the battle, he heard, or thought he heard, that distant sound of cannon beyond the Kentucky hills; and he knew that a bullet had found a brave man's heart in its path, and that the name was for one who was no more.

In the morning when Monna found him under the pines, ankle deep in spikes and cones, listening still to the ghostly voices above him, she was about to scold; but the spirit of mystery brooded upon him, and she was silent. She heard his prophecy, half-believed, and trembled.

That night there were flying rumours of battle. In the afternoon there came a yellow

envelope, and in it was the message Gee-Boy had given—"Killed in a charge."

Three nights later, as the boy sat in the dormer-window seat, he heard far down the river the sound he was awaiting—the long-drawn, deep, melancholy bellow of the *Tarascon*. At last he saw her lights as she steamed around the big bend, and his eyes followed her to the wharf. In the gray of morning they brought the soldier home, with dead march and arms reversed; and in the afternoon they laid him away in the little burying-ground across the yellow gully, on the next knob; and he is tenting there to-night.

"Fanfinx," said Gee-Boy, speaking to his little playmate that evening, as they looked tearfully at each other through the fence, "it was wrong for me to be so angry; no gentleman would be so. And you may call your papa Potchy and your mamma Monna; for Potchy means a good papa, and Monna means a good mamma. Now I will call my papa Auchophet-Man; only I won't tell you

what it means. But if you will come to the Blugg-Blugg Tree, I will show you how the seven regiments won the fight."

But Fanfinx only looked through the palings, and sobbed.

VII

PIECES OF THE TRUE CROSS

THE Green Bullfrog—a captive from a marshy spot in the creek—lived down the dank cellar-way. It had a cool nook under the bottom step, between two loosened bricks; and here it luxuriated in the delicious juicy damp that oozed from floor and wall. By day it had little to do but to brood upon its own being and to ponder the burly blue flies that spotted the dark, red-walled moat, and buzzed angrily when any forked creature from above opened the doors and let down the sultry summer heat; but at night it went up the steps, hop, hop, hop, and sat on the well-curb near at hand, considered the stars, how they were ordained, and incidentally, as occasion offered, caught a bug.

Hither, one night, its captor, a young

boy, brought a jar of strangely luminous insects, whose fellows might be seen flying about, having come down, doubtless, from the sky. One of the winged stars was held before the frog's mouth, and—gobble! it was gone. Which seemed to please the small boy mightily; for with spasms of giggling, he seized the little beast roughly, digging his sweltering fingers into its soft clammy stomach, and bore it away into a great dark place called the house, where the air was like a becalmed sirocco. The Green Frog felt itself going up and up, until it was put into a window where it could see some great trees. Then the captor, the giggling continuing, opened the jar and fed the luminous insects to his captive until all had gone down into the ravening maw. He now closed the wooden shutters, slid his fingers noisily along the slats, and after a moment of silence there in the darkness of Egypt, broke into roars of laughter. Surely, there was the light that never was in frog or toad. The thin skin of the batrachian glowed from within

with the light of a hundred lightning-bugs.

The boy rolled on the floor and shouted out, "Oh, Monna-Monna Slim Lady, come and see the green goblin, the bluxy Chinese lantern." But the hot silence from below returned no answer. The boy dragged his bed across the floor to the window, propped himself up on pillows and stared at the frog's luminous pulsing throat; and the frog stared too, stolidly, with no diminution of dignity.

Long and long the boy watched, until the light dimmed to a lustre, and the frog began to take on the Egyptian hue about. As it did so, it grew and grew, until it seemed a great beast like Jonah's whale, with legs; and its mouth was a door of a radiance so inviting that the boy got up from his bed and marched directly into it. Straightway he found himself under a miniature sky with stars strangely unfixed. The Pleiades were flying about on their way to a picnic; and the constellation of Orion, bands and all, was loosed. The boy laughed loudly. But even as he laughed the wandering stars

grew dim, then went out, and all was as dark as the river when at night it swirled and eddied murderously in its blackness. He could see it, by some necromancy, far below him, over the dim edge of the bluff where he stood with Potchy and Monna; and suddenly he was falling over the edge. Potchy clutched at him, but vainly; down he went to muddy death.

He had shot about half-way down the height of the bluff, counting, as he fell, the holes the swallows made in the clay, when he was stricken with remorse because he had left behind him no memento; so off came his hat—a silk one, cut down from Potchy's castaway—and shot upward, and fell with sure aim on the devoted head that had once worn it, tilting a little toward the left ear, jauntily. Duty done, the boy proceeded onward in obedience to the uncompromising law of falling bodies, and was about to plunge into the river's deeps, when the Green Frog came splashing up and caught him in its mouth. The boy laughed aloud. Shade

of Sam Patch! Clearly it was a world where some things could be done as well as others, and where all need not be just so.

The Green Frog was sumptuously furnished within—as much so as the *Tarascon*. There was a cabin of priceless luxury, a table the boy had all to himself, and forty nigger waiters. The engines rumbled, and the smoke-stacks wheezed hollowly, as only a Green Frog's stacks can wheeze when it is steaming up stream a thousand miles a minute, and the paddles leaving two long curving lines of foam behind. But then—the boy thought of it with horror—the falls were above, and no steamboat ever struck them and lived. Smash! Bang! The Green Frog's nose was against the rocks, and the boy began to say, "Now I lay me," just as he had once said it with his head against the bluxy butcher-shop. The paint was almost worn off it, and as it scratched his forehead he stood up straight, and could n't help seeing through the window that Potchy and Monna were within. Entering, he stood by them

before the counter, where they were buying a Dilemma tenderloin. Some evil would surely befall. Yes, there it was, coming in at the back door—the Dilemma itself, head lowered; and astride of it was the Julep-Devil. The horned beast stood quite still and said,—

"Let us sing hymn 581,716, 'There is a gate; there stands a jar.' I will not read the hymn. All sing."

"You can't work it yourself," screamed the boy desperately.

"Ba-a-a-a," quoth the Dilemma, threateningly.

"Come on," shouted the boy.

The Green Frog hung out a green lantern over one eye, and a red one over the other.

The Dilemma rushed, jolting the Julep-Devil off behind the chopping block; and as he did so the Green Frog grew big, like Jonah's whale, with legs; and the boy was expecting to see himself avenged, when—he felt something lightly touching his shoulder. Unhappy dreamer—to be thus

shaken out of starland! He hoped as he opened his reluctant eyes, that it would all be continued in his next; but alas! Gee-Boy's banishment from the Eden of Dreams was at hand; the angel with the flaming sword—no, with chopping-block and cleaver, stood by him.

"Why are you lying here stifling in this hot room? And this nasty toad!—how did the thing get up here?"

"Monna, you spoiled my dream."

"Yes," was the soft reply; then a meditative pause, and,—"I am afraid I am going to spoil all your dreams."

The boy looked up at her anxiously.

"Do you know how old you are to-day?"

"Yes, twelve."

"Heavy, heavy hangs over your head, my son. When papa went away to the war, you said you would take care of me. Did you mean it, dear?"

"Yes, I meant it—every bit." The words came wearily.

"Then you must be a man, for you will

have a man's burden long before you are twenty-one. When the war broke out, the rebels took the cattle and horses on the Texas ranch, and we have nothing but the store building down in the town, which pays but little rent now, the farm down the river —and Morgan's men played havoc with it, you know, and took the stock—and this little place, and no Potchy to earn our bread for us. We shall have to have a larger garden, plant a field of potatoes in the new clearing on the southeast slope of the knob, keep more chickens, another cow, and raise pigs."

"Pigs!" exclaimed Gee-Boy, in thoughtless scorn.

"Don't turn up your nose that way, my son; it is not like a man, and the country needs men more than ever before—so many lie dead under the battle-fields, and so many have come home with empty sleeves. You should not be ashamed of work, even of caring for pigs. By-and-by you will want to go to college to prepare yourself for a

man's hard fight in the world, and there will be a struggle to get the money, and it must begin now. The way may seem hard; but it is honourable."

"Hogs!" exclaimed Gee-Boy, under his breath. "To raise hogs!" It was a menial task for a boy whose father had scorned to become governor, and had become a general. The world a workhouse! A piggery! And what would the girl in the gray waist think? And Fanfinx? But Fanfinx didn't count much; he had known her always.

Mother and son talked long; and when the low hum of their voices ceased and Monna went down stairs, Gee-Boy stole away, a marsh of salt tears lying stagnant in his soul. As he closed the garden gate, a dank wind put a film of mist over his eyes; and the smoke from the kitchen chimney hurried over the sooty edge of the loosened bricks, dropped, and rolled down over the rim of the knob. But what did Gee-Boy care for wind and weather? The serpent river could be seen twisting along from the cave-like

nook half-way down the knob's side; thither he went with his burdens.

The river lacks the melancholy of the sea, but has all its mystery. Like the human soul, it comes from the unknown, and again goes where no man can see. Like life, it makes no explanation of its purposes. Like death, it comes silently, and no man's hand can stay it. Yet it has a voice to him who listens and is patient—an admonition of resignation to the powers that be, an acceptance of what is, a contentment in the will of the Irresistible. If fretful man could only heed!

A preliminary flurry of rain, wind-driven, swept diagonally from the Kentucky shore straight to the knob, leaving a long streak of beaten white on the dun river; and Gee-Boy cowered back under the ledge, watched the rain spread and thicken until the wind was smothered in it, thought of the cross laid upon him, and of others that had been but warnings.

It seemed that the world's work had to

be done; and even the dreamers could not escape. Softened by the picture before him, he accepted the burdens with a sigh; if it tasked Monna to appease creditors, it was only right that he should help; but it would be better and pleasanter if these sordid people needed no appeasing. What were they good for but to serve folk made of finer clay? He hated the breed—delvers in dirt, biters of coin, liars, and thieves, and dirty like the stuff they delved in; they blew their noses in a way most uglesome to behold, and straightway shook hands with their friends. He ruminated, too, on his interrupted dream, on his past illusions and their corresponding disillusions. A natural pagan, he gave up reluctantly the idea of the divinity of Caprice. He knew nothing of the word Law, but he had learned that things had to happen "just so," and that no one could possibly prevent them. He had once confidently believed that the man in the moon had been put there for burning brush on Sundays; now this tenet of his religion

had become a myth. Once he had believed it easy for the faithful to move mountains; now he feared that even the faithful had their limitations. Once he had feared that the world might be a great hallucination; now he knew it was but too, too solid. Perhaps Fanfinx was right in her apparent belief that the destiny of woman was dolls and preserves; only, to his sex, it would be turnips and pigs. Pigs! The opposite belief had yet only too strong a grip upon him, in spite of the shades of the prison-house. "You have but one life to live," Monna had said to him in parting, "so make the most of it." He couldn't believe this; and Monna could not have meant it. Life evidently came from some unknown place, just as the river did; and after flowing by a long time, passed on forever to flow in lands not disclosed to human view. Then why labour for meat, which perisheth? Why bother one's self with trifles like—pigs, when it was so much more agreeable just to drift on, and play and dream and see the world go

by? True, his fathers had laboured, had done their share in piling up the world's sum of wealth; but then, if we should all do just as our fathers did, we should still be clad in fig-leaves. To encourage him, Monna had said that all things come to him who goes after them. But he didn't want things; he wanted thoughts. Thoughts were real; things, but poor blind blundering imitations; thoughts obeyed his will, but he obeyed the will of things; a Green Frog that could turn himself into a steamboat with hollow wheezing stacks was a thing of more interest to him than any number of grunting, face-making porkers.

There was another thing, too, that Monna had mentioned incidentally—one of the little burdens that had been warnings; the tyranny of the moral law that the world had been gathering in her six thousand years. As he had grieved because things must be just so, now he grieved because he must "behave" just so. The frown of the righteous was to be reckoned with—another restraint upon his liberty; another hurdle before his vaulting

spirit. He had recently had a fight with a young copperhead who had called him a nigger-lover, had been beaten by a longer reach and heavier fists, had come home bloody but uncowed, swearing a renewal of the battle at the first meeting with his enemy. Monna had given him a long lecture on the Christian doctrine of returning good for evil and of turning the other cheek; and now she had repeated it, hoping to fortify him with self-restraint; but he had replied with manifest protest in voice and face, "If a fellow turned the other cheek, nobody could tell whether he was a Christian or a coward." Monna was silent. It was but too true doctrine. Gee-Boy did not forget that she did not reply.

Rebounding from these unpleasant thoughts his mind came back to the storm-beaten river. Not long before, he had looked forward to the time when he should be a pilot, and guide steamboats up and down the yellow stream. The future had looked like a dream; life would be a game. Now it

seemed that he was taking a last look at all he held dear. Work, work! A torture devised by the devil—truly a creature more subtile than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made! More pleasant far to watch the rain on the water, or to sit under a locust-tree, as he sat often for hours at a time, away from sights of farms and work-shops, to eat the long racemes of papilionaceous blossoms, and to watch the pelting drops dimple the dust where the cattle had trodden the grass dead. He had been, but a few hours before, as chirrupy as a cricket in the chimney corner; now he was dumb, and had no more life than a grasshopper climbing a stalk of corn. When he awoke hereafter, each morning, he would have to think of coops and sties instead of lying in a delicious half-slumber, listening to the wrens on the roof, or the jay-bird sharpening his bill on the waterspout. He wished he could shrivel to a beetle, and live in the shadow of a dandelion; or a frog, yes, a frog, and croak in a puddle.

Life, then, as he grew older, appeared to become more narrow and circumscribed, more beset with difficulties, more full of incongruities of things and even of thoughts. Would these increase as he approached manhood? Had men done evil that they were compelled to travel stony ways with burdens on their backs, seeing no farther than their noses? Gee-Boy began to wonder whether God had actually made the world, so distinctly was the trail of the serpent over it. Perhaps when God was resting from his labours on the seventh day, the devil tried his own hand by stealth.

The whirl of his thoughts went on, tumultuously, disorderly; the hours fled unreckoned; night and clouds blotted out river and farther shore; Gee-Boy was alone, resigned but unsatisfied—conscious of having neither will nor way to cope with life's stubborn facts, defeated in his desire to create his own environment, feeling the solution of the problem of living as far away as the edge of the world. That night he tossed

with weary dreams, and in the morning he awoke to care.

There was a whisper outside his window. He wondered how many leagues of wind he had heard blow through those pines. He wondered if he should ever know what the Green Frog did to the Dilemma. He wondered if the Julep-Devil would help him build a pig-pen.

Pigs! Pigs!

VIII

AMO, 1.v.a.

IF Nature had only vouchsafed consciousness to old earth!—the power to feel her youth renewed each returning Spring; to know a second time, yes, for infinite times, the ecstasy of violets bursting through her gray winter thatch; to give birth to the springing grass and the tender green of budding trees; to be conscious of wayward blossoms wavering downward through the soft air to rest upon her bosom; to hear in the trees the chat of newly awakened squirrels; to see the lambent flit of red-birds through the young foliage, and to be sensible of the warmth of children's feet upon her. What a privilege to die each year, and awake again to an ever new surprise! But Nature has not been kind. Cruel—she never gives her fullest. Earth feels no perennial joys

trickling through her deep-laid veins; but, dull and lifeless, whirls on through the weary cycles, bearing an ever-renewed happiness she cannot feel; while to man, who wastes his days in a vain search for the fountain of youth, who would give the paradise to come for a few Faust births, is grudgingly given one poor little Spring, and this often blighted by frost.

But this is mere sentiment; perhaps sentimentality; the rest is satire. In due time Gee-Boy's Spring came on with violets in her hand. The season was a riot of new-born erotic emotion; his mental images were eternally cuddling and spooning. If he had ever had a thought, it had left no trace in his brain-works. It was enough to feel that every drop of his blood had a bubble in it. One day he found among his father's books a little volume in which the first line of a chapter caught his eye: "In this refulgent Summer it has been a pleasure to draw the breath of life." The one sentence was the glorification of all that could be felt about

the knobs and the river in those happy days of the young year; a happy background of many simple dreams of nesting, and it filled full his measure of delight. To such uses are put the words of the sage. "In this refulgent Summer it has been a pleasure to draw the breath of life," he repeated endlessly, as he looked out over the wonderful picture at Blue Knob's foot—"a pleasure to draw the breath of life." He made a futile attempt or two to read the whole essay. That required thinking. To feel was enough. It was Gee-Boy's only Spring, and there was a canker in its bud. This was the way of it:

A timid bounding of the heart seized the witling when Fanfinx confronted him with her saucy, half-suspicious look, or when Ruth met him, shyly, with eyes that glowed tenderly from her alternately flushed and paled cheeks; and he would leave the one afraid, and the other—he knew not how; only lightly, very lightly. In days but recently gone by, his favourite flower had been the spicy, heavy-odoured carnation; but his fickle

faith now flitted to violets, and he wore them in his buttonhole, fancying at times they were for Fanfinx, and at times for Ruth; scarcely conscious that the former was a trivial effort.

"Why do you wear them—the violets, I mean?" Ruth asked him one day.

They had met in front of the cottage in New Moon Street, which was only across the park from her father's great house, with the crouching stone lions keeping guard before it.

"Because," he said, with a sudden tide of courage, which ebbed before he had finished the sentence, "because they remind me of yo—somebody." He sniffed at them awkwardly.

Ruth's eyes drooped. The two, boy and maid, walked on to her house and sat on the lions, not afraid of them, but of each other; and Ruth looked happy, and Gee-Boy silly; and a man who passed felt his sleeve pulsating with laughter.

That night the youth of the budding love

remained out very late, intending to hear the morning stars sing together. Opposite Ruth's house he leaned against a friendly town pump for a space, and then invaded the little park, where he reclined on a bench hid in the shrubbery, and listened to a song that came dancing across the way—a light song of life and love that awakened anew that delicious bubbling in his veins. Then another, a tale of lost love, with an undermelody bursting into occasional fits of passion in the pauses; and the concert was over, and Ruth was first and the stars nowhere. He looked up to them pityingly from his seclusion in the shadows. In the old days his grandfather had been beaten in his third race for the mayoralty because of his extravagance in buying that park: Gee-Boy thought it cheap at any price.

Then he circled the square in which the Dulcinea of the moment lived, gazing with a goose-look up at her window, through whose closed shutters the light peeped in faint slits, until at last, when the room was

suddenly darkened, he leaped the fence, ensconced himself in the shadow of a lion, and dreamed dreams all boys have dreamed before.

The vernal habits of a schoolboy's fancy are spoony and melodramatic; a description would be too much like a confession to be told in Gath or published in the streets of Askelon; and would, besides, be too truthful to be set down on pages not truth, but only a summer's fancy; so let them pass with an epigram: To have so much blood that it spills easily at the nose—this is to be young and in love. Concerning which, one disgruntled Schopenhauer hath spoken much wisdom.

By and by, Gee-Boy's reveries were interrupted by voices and footsteps in the streets; and his blush made a glow like a lightning-bug's on a June night. Two big red-tipped cigars were coming along talking with each other; one of them sent a big ring of smoke up toward the very sentimental moon, and said, with the sagest flourish,—

"Don't do it, my boy; it's folly. An old teacher of mine—I've spoken of him before; a good fellow; we called him Uncle Tommy—once said, 'To be in love is to be struck by a shower of nonsense.' Don't ask her. Love is as inevitable as measles, comes about the same time, and is as soon cured. You're too young to know your own mind. Wait a while. Tarry at Jericho till your beard be grown. No girls for me. If old Corbinson is re-elected to Congress this fall, he will appoint me to the military academy. I'll wed my profession. A sword is the best wife; it cuts the other fellow. Don't marry until you are seventy; there'll be less time left to repent. Why, man, love is like rheumatism—the first pangs have a funny streak in them, and you hold your knee, or your heart, and laugh; but you let them get worse, and all the funny feeling is gone. Take a fool's advice, and learn to don't. There is a boy in my room at the West Academy who is in love—struck by the shower. Dreams in class. I ask him to

read *Arma virumque*, and he is startled, turns scarlet, and looks silly. The other day I asked him the construction of a word—an accusative of specification, it was—and he stammered out, 'Violets.' He wears 'em in his buttonhole. He is daffy, clean daffy. There are two girls in the case, and he doesn't know which dear charmer he wishes away."

"This old teacher of yours," said the other cigar—"he really became your uncle, didn't he? Married your aunt, I think you told me once."

"Yes, but-uh"——

The two big cigars were gone.

Gee-Boy sprang to his feet. The damp night air chilled his flaming cheek, and seemed to strike his spirit and sweep away all illusion-making mists. He leaped the fence, and went home ashamed, temporarily, but dogged.

Thus with softness and sentimentality—the mere thoughtless ebullition of a boy's fickle blood—did the idyllic part of Gee-

Boy's life approach a climax; after it, less wholly was he to live in a world of his own creation, and more in a world created for him; less sport was to be his, and more grief; less comedy, much tragedy; for so runs the world away. Beware, Gee-Boy, the rapids are below you. And one of those fire-tipped Havanas that bobbed along the street last night is unconsciously to lure you into them. So,——

"No," said the professor (every teacher in the young West was professored), "let us not call him pious; I have too much respect for Æneas to call him pious."

"Well, he wasn't pious, anyway," interrupted Fanfinx in her high piping voice—high and shrill because, doubtless, her ancestresses had had to shoo the chickens off the porch. "He wouldn't have run away from Dido if he had been." Fanfinx was sixteen, and had ideas.

The eyes of the girl of the gray waist grew sad (the gray waist had become a habit with her—why, she never said); and she

had to crush down an impetuous little desire to glance ever so hastily at Gee-Boy.

"Do you think so?" the professor replied; a youngish professor he was, and rather fond of loitering over the amatory passages; fond, too, apparently, of a certain familiarity and incipient impudence from his pupils, or, perhaps, unable to prevent it. He continued, "Other men who have passed for pious have done the same thing; and some have begun early. A man who can face bullets without feeling his legs turn coward, may be utterly craven in a love affair. Now I heard a story once (the professor's eyes twinkled, and he carefully avoided looking at Gee-Boy) about a young man of nine summers, or rather winters, for the snow was on the ground, who was an Æneas in a small way. Like the great hero, he

> "—loved and ran away,
> And lived to love another day."

"He didn't love her if he ran away," retorted Fanfinx.

"Probably not; no more did Æneas."

Fanfinx, and all the room, looked expectant, and a shade of sadness darkened the gray waist.

"You want to know about it?" asked the professor. "Well, you have heard that love is blind. It's a mistake. Love's eyes are microscopes. A man in love can see qualities in his *Felix Dido* that are not visible to the naked eyes of other men. The trouble with this young Æneas was that there were two *Felices Didones*, and with his magnifying eyes he saw much that was too bluxy to cast away; and they—*Infelices*, really—were sleepless because each feared he thought more of the other than of her."

"Pooh! I don't believe it," Fanfinx pouted.

"True, nevertheless. And it so happened that the boy's mother gave one of the rival girls a Maltese kitten, and when the other girl heard of it, she was jealous."

"How silly!"

"Of course she was silly. All girls are, under

the circumstances. And boys too. Yet she said nothing, being modest. But the boy, by an intuition that was almost feminine, knew how she felt, and he told her that if he had given the kitten away, he would have given it to her. A bird of the air carried the matter to little Miss Other Girl, the one who had the kitten, and the next day she met the boy. They were at the top of a big hill, and the boy had his sled along, for the coasting was good. She said to him, 'Did you tell So-and-so that if you had given the kitten you would have given it to her?' Now what do you suppose the brave boy did?"

Fanfinx's face had become very red. So had the face of the girl of the gray waist. Gee-Boy looked murder. But the professor went on; he was not timid.

"Well, what *could* he do? There are times (the professor settled himself in his chair for a scholarly dissertation) when one must yield to circumstances. For example, I have been through the Latin grammar a dozen

times, more or less, from *Mensa* to the Meters of Horace, but have never discovered a royal method of distinguishing purpose from result. As a teacher, what am I to do? Why, in a doubtful case, if one of you pupils says 'purpose,' I congratulate you on your discernment; and would, impartially, do the same if you said 'result.' I take to my heels, you understand. It is one of the tricks of the trade. So the soldier, when he knows he can't hold a position, runs away; and the lover, when he can't face a woman scorned, runs away. Now our young hero couldn't say No, for he had taken the hatchet story very seriously. He couldn't say Yes, for there were livid lightnings in the small woman's eyes. So he tumbled onto his sled, and sped, belly-buster, down the kn—hill, I mean."

The pupils laughed loudly, except three.

"Don't you think it is a good story, Turner?" asked the professor, smiling blandly at Gee-Boy.

"Very," returned Gee-Boy. "I'm fond of

ancient history—particularly personal history."

"I'm glad," said the professor, "for I have some more—modern history, too, this; and personal, no doubt." He drew forth a fresh newspaper from his desk. "Here it is in our local abstract and brief chronicle of the times—you know what Hamlet said about the players. Now gather and surmise." And the professor began to read, with many vocal and facial flourishes, thus suiting the action to the word,—

"'The other evening as our night reporter quietly meandered through and about this thriving metropolis, he meditated upon many things. Then did he come to the conclusion that riches are vain, and awfully hard to obtain; that fame is, a bauble and that love is the only thing worth having. But as he promenaded by one of our massive piles dedicated to learning, his heart was about to go forth in poetic strains, when, lo! not many steps distant, he descried a youthful form, stilted in a tragic pose, and then he heard ravings, the force of which was exhausted from much repetition. Grasping note-book and pencil, he hastily advanced, hoping for a chance to distinguish himself. But no—it was only a student uttering some unintelli-

gible sounds. "What is it?" asked our N. R. "Nothing, nothing to interest you or your thousands of readers, noble searcher after truth; only a little note. If I'd known that she corresponded with him, do you suppose that I would go to sociables and donation parties and everywhere with her? No! A thousand times, No! But I tire you with many words," said the youth. "Read for yourself." He then handed to our N. R. the following gentle effusion.

"""It's too bad I lost it. I think it dropped into the dough that I made up last night because my old black mammy said I could n't. Aren't you sorry you did n't let Fanfinx wear it instead of me? Now you will have to get another, but you can afford it, making five hundred a year out of the poor little piggie-wiggies. Or maybe you are going to sue me for damages. Oh, please don't; and some day if I ever find the little piggie that cried wee wee all the way home, I'll give it to you. Perhaps you would prefer the one that could n't get over the barn door, but I don't think he is very fat, because he did n't have anything to eat. She lives on Upper Sixth, near Market, does n't she? Her name is Ella N——. I can't spell it because it's Dutch, but I'll tell you what it is some other time. She goes to the East Academy, don't she? And you have to go so far next Saturday night. Nigger's night, too. Of course I'm rude to say this, but then maybe I'm a little jealous. You might suspect it from my yellow handkerchief. It's mammy's. I got it by mistake. Well, I'm glad you think she's cute and smart, a real Dolly Varden. But then——.

Does she say wit for with? And does Fanfinx know her? Poor Fanfinx! Yes, I nearly collapsed when I read that. Who would have thought it? And they're engaged too. Of course I won't tell. You need n't worry. I won't show Sid any of your notes—nor anybody. Cross my heart. Hope to die. Oh, I don't care if you talk to Polly, only it makes you an instrument with four strings, as the professor would say. She does n't wish me to write notes to you. Hush up; you make me vain. No, she spells it the good old-fashioned way. She used to spell it S-m-y-t-h-e for fun. Don't Fanfinx look pretty this aft? Isn't Virgil a bore? Please let me see you spin your top at recess or show me how to. Destroy this, please.

"'"P.S. What is the specific gravity of water? Write it on a sheet of paper so I can see it. I never could understand those things.

"'"Second P.S. Maybe it will turn up in the bread."'

"And the reporter concludes with,

"'Not having the key, we simply present the above great rhetorical effort in all its complicated obscurity.'"

"There," said the professor. "Now what do you think of that?"

The girl of the gray waist, after a moment of consternation and dumb terror, had settled down into a supernormal calm, but there was a white zone about her lips. Fanfinx

blushed, laughed, and looked triumphant. Gee-Boy looked and thought murder; and the professor never knew how near he came to a school-room fight. Polly, Sid, and Miss S-m-y-t-h-e looked painfully conscious, while the rest of the room, as they afterward voted, had more fun than a bag of monkeys.

"Tell me, Turner, what do you think of it?" repeated the professor. "Doesn't it strike you as a masterly production?"

"I was wondering," Gee-Boy retorted, "what it had to do with Virgil."

"That is just what I was wondering," replied the professor. "And I daily wonder the same thing about many things that go on in this room. One would think that Virgil were a person of small importance."

"He was a horse-doctor; you have said so yourself," Gee-Boy shot back.

"True, but he knew women as well as horses. Now if Dido had written a note"——

"Virgil could not have made it public."

"Why not?"

"Well, Cæsar said that all gall is divided

into three parts; and I don't suppose any one fellow had 'em all—not even Virgil."

The professor was evidently jogged. "'A hit; a very palpable hit,'" said he. "But, as I was going to say, if Dido had written a note to Æneas, she would have praised her rivals, if she had had any, as sweetly as the author of this little epistle has praised hers, and no doubt would have made her Latin as bad as this English."

"Pardon me, Professor," Gee-Boy interrupted with satanic politeness, "Dido did not speak Latin; neither did Æneas."

The professor blushed. "True," he said. "Pray excuse the slip. And all the same she would have felt like pulling her rival's hair."

The girl of the gray waist grew whiter about the lips; and Fanfinx's color glowed triumphantly.

"And then she would have disparaged her own charms, expecting in return a compliment from Æneas; for she would have known how to manage a Lothario so gay and popular among the ladies. Have we not

an instance here? Woman is the same the world over; Virgil knew her like—like a horse."

"You seem to be well informed yourself, Professor," Gee-Boy observed.

"Yes, and I was young not long ago, and went to the academy as you do, and"——

"Wrote notes," interrupted Gee-Boy impudently.

"I was about to remark further," the professor continued, quelling with a frown a rising laugh, "that Dido would not always have spoken of her rival so sweetly; at the proper time her eyes would have shot the livid lightnings; her tongue, too, was double-edged, so that she was in as much danger from it as other people were. So we see woman, as Virgil understood her—the enigma, with moods like the sky in April. Which leads me to observe that a school-room is a good place in which to study human nature. However, this particular phase of school-room work should be reserved for the teacher; pupils should attend to very different matters—Virgil, for instance."

"If I have understood you correctly," Gee-Boy suggested, blandly, "the Æneid is a good study of human nature."

"A quibble, Turner, and not worthy of you."

"But," persisted Gee-Boy, "shouldn't we study life as well as books? I have heard you say that that is a modern pedagogical maxim."

"You are wise beyond your years, Turner. Note-writing, however, is not in the curriculum; and however interesting it may be to those who write over the doors of their schools, "Man, know thy Woman, you must stop it at once or"——

"You carry out my idea exactly, Professor."

"Yes, on a shutter."

The bell rang.

"I think we may safely say," concluded the professor, rising, "'Thus endeth the morning lesson.' Let it be a life-lesson. The next will begin in the middle of line 569, —'*Varium et mutabile semper Femina.*'"

And now you are in the rapids, Gee-Boy. And there are two currents, one that might cast you ashore on an island of happiness, where in safety and peace you might contemplate the tumult about you, and one that will certainly drag you over the cataract; and you don't know which from t'other. So,——

The night was as black as the ninth plague of Egypt; and the old mare, with the dejected colt by her side, moved cautiously along the dusty road, meditating upon the folly of what her driver and his little auburn-haired maid called picnics. Nines miles out and nine miles back; and she with the rickety old phaeton behind her, bringing up the rear of a long procession of giddy young people of the puppy-love age, who had taken their fill of jaunting and junketing. Just twenty hearts—twenty hearts that beat as ten! What was the good of so much travel? Were not the knobs about the town as good as those of Stoyman Township? And what virtue in so much blackbird chatter? Only

the mare and the colt were silent—nine miles out and nine miles back. Fanfinx, by half-hidden poutings and sly upturnings of the right side of her pretty nose (in all of which there was a trace of insincerity that Gee-Boy was too much of a booby to detect), had shown her regret that she had made such a choice of escort, and had endeavoured to give the impression that it was fortunate for him that she had given her word before the note appeared in the paper; but when she had seen, gravely waiting at her front door, the proud mother between the shafts of the old phaeton, and the prouder son hitched to her side (where, colt-like, he thought he would draw the whole load), there had been a flash of her eye and a stamp of her foot in which the keenest and coldest observer could have detected no dissimulation. Was she to travel through the town and half the county in a fat-stock show? She had hesitated a moment before putting her foot on the step, and finally had bounded in, feeling that the die had

been cast for her; but she had rewarded her bucolic escort by ignoring him the whole day, by snubbing him openly in a game of "King William was King James's son," by flirting desperately with Sidney, and by torturing poor Ruth into silence and pale despair. It was not for nothing that the gods had topped her with flaming locks. But when the day was done and the return began, she lost her spirit. And the night was as black as the ninth plague of Egypt; and the old mare plodded along in the thick dust; and the dejected colt dragged at his strap until the wheel bumped him.

An hour before, Gee-Boy had been full of burning words—words all the hotter for having smouldered long in his soul. How often had he dreamed over what he would say one day to one of the two! Now the time had come; events had turned his love to Fanfinx; but, alas! the stream of it seemed log-jammed, and flowed but tardily. He parted his lips to speak, but was voiceless. What was the reason, he didn't know,

but Fanfinx seemed too far away to hear the soft tones his fancy had used in the thousand times it had conjured up this little scene. Curious!—for some unaccountable reason it occurred to him at this moment that the moon had once looked like a pancake. But the night had begun to yawn, and minutes were golden; he forced his mood, and said,—

"Fanfinx, won't you speak to me?"

No answer.

"Fanfinx, you know I love you, and have always loved you."

No answer, but a contemptuous little spluttering sniff!

"Do answer me, Fanfinx; I can't endure your silence." And the simpleton didn't know what a desirable virtue it was in her.

"I dare not speak," the young miss returned, "for fear of annoying the colt."

Gee-Boy feared his blush would dispel the darkness and reveal itself. He made no reply.

"I never knew any one so stupid," said Fanfinx, hotly.

Gee-Boy hung his head, and the reins drooped.

"Fanfinx, you were always cruel. I believe if you had my heart in your hand, you would throw it to the ground and trample on it." This was a fine speech; he had practised it often.

"I would. It thinks too much of gray waists."

"How can you say it, Fanfinx?"

"And it beats faster when a note comes across the aisle."

"No, no, Fanfinx, I found her out to-day. Sid told me all. The note dropped out of my pocket; she picked it up, and after school showed it to him and bragged that she was leading me a pretty dance. She said it would be a great joke to put it in his father's paper. Would you believe that any girl could think of such a thing—a note she wrote herself, too? Well, she did; and Sidney wrote the introduction. That's the whole story. I never heard of a girl doing any thing so contemptible. And vain." In the

impetuous haste of his speech, Gee-Boy forgot that in all the days he had known Ruth, she had never been guilty of any deception or any ungentle act; forgot to form his judgment on this rather than on a story bearing all the marks of guile; forgot how often and how much his own heart had warmed into a quiet, restful contentment in her presence; forgot her benevolent, self-denying spirit; forgot the magic effect of her glance, and, above all, forgot her soft resonant voice; forgot all this—wheedled, bewitched by a little minx who never had an unselfish thought in all her life; beneath whose every act was spite, or trickery, or both; who never had a word responsive to any feeling higher than the sordid things of earth. Had he only known that his mistake foreboded a day when a certain Philistine should be upon him!

Fanfinx bit her lip to keep down an upwelling expression of triumph. "Pooh!" she blurted out presently. "It's taken you a long time to find her out. I hate her—hate her!"

"Don't mention her again. I renounce her and all her works. It is you I love, Fanfinx; and I never knew it till to-day."

"Oh—so? You said a moment ago that you had loved me always."

"Don't pick me up in my words, Fanfinx," he replied, defensively bracing himself for a fine speech, one that might exalt his emotion. "You know what I mean. I never knew how noble you are until I saw how ignoble somebody else is. Don't you know that I love you? I want to live my whole life for you."

"And the colt," suggested little miss.

"Fanfinx, you are joking with me; but I hear your breath come quick, and I know your heart beats fast." He put his arm around her, and drew her close. A little feathery wisp of her hair touched his cheek and sent a million thrills skurrying through him. And he said silly things that boys say on such occasions; and took himself seriously; and did not know that his premeditated utterance was hollow, hollow.

Fanfinx, cat-like, permitted herself to be nestled closely, and was silent. Gee-Boy bent his head and kissed her—once, twice, thrice; and the little wisps of hair engendered that priceless ravishment.

"Now are you satisfied?" she asked, looking up.

The night was silent save for the ragged voices of crickets in the fence corners, the distant chorus of frogs in a marsh, and the far-away heart-quickening blast of a steamboat. The old mare and the colt plodded on; the reins drooped; and love's young dream dreamed on.

It must have been a quarter of an hour, when the startling clatter of the ill-matched team's hoofs on the loose boards of a little bridge warned Gee-Boy that the end of the fateful journey was at hand.

"Come, Fanfinx," he said softly, "you must tell me now."

Fanfinx shook a little with what had every appearance of a sob, and put her hands to her face.

"Tell me now," pleaded Gee-Boy.

"I—I—suppose so," said Fanfinx, faintly.

Gee-Boy suddenly took her in his arms and pressed her close. "Fanfinx, I love you—love you."

Fanfinx lay still a moment, and then struggled to be free. "Don't, Gee-Boy, don't," she demanded, with a trace of impatience, "you—you muss my collar."

The trail of the Serpent!

IX

APPLES OF SODOM

GEE-BOY hardly realised how it came about that he couldn't keep his fingers out of the ink-pot; yet the fact was present that from time to time elegies and odes smeared them, triolets stained his nails, and once a fragment of an epic streaked his shirt front in heroic lines. The cause lay, doubtless, in a little seed of ambition that was ready to sprout just in time to be fertilised in a mind much harrowed by dissensions at home. Fanfinx was an ill-tempered thing, and, alas! his own. Things that happened now reminded him of events long gone by; the moon, forsooth, had once looked like a pancake, and an unmussed collar was more to be desired than many kisses. Afterward, Fanfinx had failed to be gratefully moved on being told that he

would forego the last two years of his college life for her sweet sake; no sympathetic response, neither, when told of the purchase of "my little house in New Moon Street." A cozy little nest, this, with an air of seclusion; its garden was in constant danger of slipping down the slope into the river; and here one could look over the house-tops below and see the smoke-stacks of the steamboats; and, glancing westward over the chimneys, the old home on the knobs and the four green sentinels. But the hours of ecstasy dreamed of here were hours of disappointment; Fanfinx's soul and Gee-Boy's were not in unison; she could never get up to his mood, and he never down to hers; he wished they might be content with plain living and high thinking, she that their eyes might stand out with fatness. His star was far away, and fading. He was not a man to discover easily that his love had been unwisely given; and now, when it was ripe and manly, he had no one to pour it out upon, not even his little daughter, who was always

too well dressed to be "mussed"; so it was dammed up in his heart, ready to burst its bounds. Riding home day after day from the farm, where he superintended the care of the despised porkers, he hoped for a smile and a caress from his wife and child; and day after day he met peevish complaints and unapproachable frocks. And it came to be a constant thought with him that the thing one has is never so good as the thing one wants, and that the answer to the problem of living was ever as far away as the edge of the world.

One fretful day in the fall when the scarlet and yellow trees were dancing on the knobs, Gee-Boy wandered up hill and down dale in a fit of starved melancholy, until he came into the lee of a low bluff or ledge on the river's edge. A bit of colour on the water side of a rock caught his eye—a little blue flower with long hairy stamens, stretching toward the south; the most beautiful flower he had ever seen. Its isolation, its life prolonged beyond the summer only to be caught

at last by the stormy autumn, stirred his compassion, and almost without realizing it he began a little jingle, to a harebell.

Little Harebell, wet with dew,
Blowing where thy forebears blew,
A little year before thee,
Dost thou know that life is brief?
Frost will blast thy bloom, thy leaf;
Such fate was theirs that bore thee.

Little Harebell, coloured blue,
Thine, methinks, is a sombre hue—
Ah, startle not, I pray thee;
For when I am sad and gloomy,
And all things are sombre to me,
Then I'm blue, I say thee.

So my colour's like to thine,
And thy life is like to mine—
Evil winds shall blow thee;
Evil winds shall blow me too,
To a land beyond the blue,
Where I hope to know thee.

True, Gee-Boy did not know this flower to be a harebell, which, he seemed to remember, had five petals, while this had but three; and, if his botany served him, the harebell

grew only in summer, now dead. So he fortified himself with a most cogent syllogism —he had never seen a harebell, nor this flower either; whence their identity. Which is logic enough for any poet. And if the little blossom were not wet with dew, but rather with a fine drizzle that had begun to slant against the bluff, it was no more a discrepancy between life and literature than he had observed at divers times in the past. He put the sheet of paper upon which he had scribbled the lines into his pocket, and strode home, foolishly dreaming that there under the clay bluff, with the slanting drizzle against it, he had been making literary history.

He entered his home with more confidence than usual, and threw the poem down on the table with an air of one who has done something worthy of remark.

Fanfinx read it critically.

"Um—awfully cute! Did you write it yourself?"

Gee-Boy nodded.

Fanfinx read again. "Yes, cute; very! What are you going to do with it?"

"Send it to a magazine."

"Do the editors pay for poetry?"

"Certainly."

"How much will you get for it?"

"Don't know."

"A dollar, do you think?"

"Don't know."

"Do you think it will bring as much as a pig?"

Gee-Boy paled.

"Pigs and poetry! I like the combination. It's a pity, Turner (she spoke to him thus formally more and more now), that you are so unbusinesslike; you are always doing something that isn't worth while. And upon my life!—written on the butcher's statement. I suppose you'll write the next one on the baker's bill; the candlestick-maker, thank Heaven! is extinct. I can't remember the time when you didn't do silly things. You've always got some Dilemma or other to fight; some sea of Galilee to walk on.

If you do any more of this stuff, I don't want to see it, *that's* all."

She threw the poem down upon the floor, and left the room. For a moment Gee-Boy tapped idly on the window, then put on his rubber coat and went out into the rain. His Spring and Summer were gone; an equinoctial storm was upon him; and there was need of meditation.

The night had fallen, and the sky held the glint of fire from the blast furnaces. He walked down to Front Street, and stood for a while under an awning before a saloon on the corner, listening to the loud talk of rowdy deck-hands within; then tramped along the levee to see a boat draw away from her wharf and slowly disappear down the river, her rows of lights glistening and her stacks belching flame, which, he felt, was no hotter than the flames blazing within him. After a time he found himself in the little park, brought to a sudden halt by a song that came sadly out into the night—a song of lost love, with an under-melody

bursting into occasional fits of passion in the pauses. His subsequent wanderings he remembered but vaguely—to the river again, up the levee, perhaps to its end, then aimlessly into the streets, by the two old market-houses to the creek beyond the town, back to —where not, conning new verses, which made themselves, on The Lost Love. They shadowed forth his grudge against the world that the thing one has is never so good as the thing one wants, that the land of heart's desire is infinitely distant; and they shamed the tenuity and the under-current of bitter humour of the lines written on the butcher's bill. But they were far too truthful an imprint of his own soul to be thrust before the vulgar, or even to be written down; only in after years was that done.

As the months went by, The Lost Love so brooded on Gee-Boy's mind that the poor little harebell jingle seemed as trivial as tavern gossip, mere droppings from the fringe of his mood; yet, try as he would, he could not equal the better performance; his true

heart had but one song to sing. There was, however, one theme, or set of themes, that warmed him, and these sadly and insufficiently—the old problems of himself and the world; the beauty and wonder of the universe which he could not accept without question and comment; the brilliancy of the day; the mysterious benediction of the night; the myriad voices of nature; the thrill of life, and the throb of love within him. All these, if anything could, compensated for the burden of his melancholy; and it sometimes expressed itself in rime—rime by no means faultless, but touched with the bitterness of the feeling that he was the sport of things, and ringing true overtones of desolation; for, savage-like, he set his songs to a minor key.

When a year had passed, Gee-Boy had a profusion of literary scraps stuffed into an old drawer in his mother's garret, and he began to think of printing. In stolen intervals he re-wrought the verses, copied them neatly and sent them to a publisher—a singu-

larly businesslike person, he thought, who wrote something about the merit of the poems—a rather vague enigmatical something —and agreed to put his imprint on the book if the poet would pay the printer. Two hundred and thirty dollars! And the price of pork was falling. The situation was pathetic. Gee-Boy scrimped for months, knowing how well he should enjoy the pointed finger, like Horace; and he put away from time to time the silver for which he betrayed the innocent swine into the hands of their slayers, all hugger-mugger, of course, for Fanfinx was handy with her two's and two's, and would have raised no end of pow-wow. At last it appeared, neatly bound—*Moods, Being Poems by Turner Dexter Brown;* and a hundred copies were sent to the reviewers.

Gee-Boy had not suspected the venom of the breed. Being now a parent and an author, he knew on how slender a thread hangs the peace of one who sends into the world child or book. He had once overheard someone say that little Grace Brown

was as silly as her father and as ill-tempered as her mother; now he read equally disturbing things of *Moods*. "The author should open his old Green's grammar at the back and learn the elements of prosody," said one. Said another, "One expects Emms, Quods & Co. to publish books that are, to say the least, above the mediocre, and not such melancholy twaddle as this." A third asked, "Why will ordinary people set themselves up for extraordinary?" Another, a Texas editor, remarked, "The poet's blood is out of order. We understand that he hails from Indiana; he should go to the woods and get a little sassafras; it's good for what ails him." "Common, distressingly common and amateurish," was another comment; and "An hour spent in reading it will be wasted," was the judgment of yet another. "Not bad for an uplondish mon," —from a critic across the river. Such wormwood was given to Gee-Boy, who itched for the bliss of being quoted, who expected "encomiums" and "tributes." There were,

besides, a few uncritical and sickening laudations from the country papers, particularly those of his own town. "We herald Mr. Brown as the coming poet of the age, and we pride ourselves on having him in our midst." And lo! this wormwood was bitterer than the rest.

Out of the mass of notices sent the dejected poet by his publisher, was one from an eastern critical journal, that was neither castigation nor blandishment. "This little book," it ran, "is doubtless the work of a young man who has taken too seriously some of the world's griefs; he has set his heart on the fruit that turns to dust when touched, and has allowed himself to become pessimistic. We fear this is a disease in a certain type of mind—the type that is idealistic enough to defy everything and everybody that seems beautiful, and sensitive enough to mourn over the inevitable disappointment. Yet we are pleased to observe that Mr. Brown hears a little of the sphere-music, and that he sees the right light

penetrating the gloom—the light of love and wonder for the great things that make up life and the world; and we trust that his future attempts will have a more hopeful note as well as a maturer touch. The following poem, which we print entire, gives the title to the volume,—

"'MOODS

"'DEPRESSION

"'Life! A vision brief;
A little joy; a world of grief;
A prayer against the day of doom;
A little journey toward the tomb.

"'ECSTASY

"'Sun!
That burns within the blue;
Stars!
That blossom in the night;
Worlds!
That make the moon a lustrous retinue;
And Eyes!
Ah, Eyes have I to see their light.

"'Violets!
That burst from out the sod;
Grasses!
That cloak the earth in green;
Rivers!

Oceans!
Forests!
Mountains!
Garments all of a beauty-loving God;
And Mind!
Ah, Mind have I to guess a little what they mean.

"'Life!
That flutters in the robin's song;
Life!
Love!
That throb plaintively in the plover's call;
Love!
Life!
That pulse through the summer, firm and strong;
And Heart!
Ah, Heart have I to cherish all.

"'Rest!
That comes at last;
Rest!
That overtakes the soul dutiful;
Death!
An endless truce to the painful past;
Death!—
Rebirth, I trust, to a life more beautiful.'"

Balm, balm! And Gee-Boy learned the friendly words by heart.

By all the canons of good judgment, the young poet's dream of fame should have

been withered and wrinkled, like an apple that has clung to its tree till mid-winter. He had done his best, unless he publish The Lost Love; and rather than this he would have poured out his heart's blood. In truth, it was his heart's blood. And he should have known that it is only this that the world will give its fig for. The masters all know it; and the greatest, by his own testimony, sold cheap what was most dear; the tyro never knows it, unless, perhaps, when the last drop of ink has dried on his pen. Gee-Boy scarcely sought to reveal his soul; but sought, rather, Fame, a capricious maid, who comes only to those who ignore her. He wanted to acquire genius, not knowing that it is something to be retained rather than acquired—a simple, sincere, childlike relation to the world, an illusioned passion and credulity that contact with our wretchedly modern life has no power to destroy. And if he had known—what? Shades of the prison-house had long been gathering about him. Witness all his

enforced disillusions, as (surely not an insignificant fact) his former feeling toward any word on the printed page, at which he used to stare until it seemed an impossible thing; now quite possible, and natural.

And Gee-Boy should have known, too, that in some way or other, a drop or two of gall embitters every cup of wine. He had read this long ago in the experience of many men; but we don't know a thing that others tell us; we must at last find it out for ourselves, and bitterly. He knew how Keats was hounded by his critics; Johnson by starvation, and rebuffs from Chesterfield; Shakespeare by an unattainable love. He knew what Marco Polo said of Kubla Khan —that he went to the hunt in a golden-lined chamber supported by four elephants; that he rode with a thousand hunters, and—the gout. And Socrates! whose words men set down in books, even to his trivial dying remark that he owed a cock to Æsculapius; yet—sorest thought of all!—the great philosopher was not more renowned for his wisdom

than for his Xanthippe. Henceforth it should have been contentment to Gee-Boy to brood and dream for the sake of brooding and dreaming; or, better still, to accept the wisdom of disillusion. Like a modern artist who contents himself with small things, he should have crowned a skull with laurel, and under it have written, "What's the Use?"

Pigs and Poetry! Swine and Sonnets!

Ah me! "Why should the spirit of mortal be proud?"

X

THE PAINS OF DEATH AND OF LIFE

THE one sad thing about mothers is that you never know how good they were till they are gone. The time came when the doors of the old house on the knob no longer stood hospitably open; no smoke wavered up from the great chimney; the shutters of aged green, closed, made the walls a solid blank, and the joyousness of long ago became mute. Yet sweetest memories of Monna remained, and, most precious of her possessions, the little old-fashioned ambrotype in its case of rubber. Raven hair parted in the middle and combed smoothly down over the ears; round neck and shoulders; dress of jettest silk; hands white and graceful—all just as Monna was when she was young; and when Gee-Boy

studied the likeness in its details and reflected upon the mortality of flesh, there recurred to him a very early impression—the heartless cruelty of Nature; the little relentless Never loomed up before him like an iron-barred fortress in his path. Yet he was progressing in the business of living. He had been a child and had seen the dreams of childhood fade; a son, and had lost a father; a man, and had become a husband and a father himself; and now he had completed the experience begun in the death of Auchophet-Man—the lives that gave his were gone; and only he and his were left, frail links between ancestry and posterity. Now he knew better what Life is, and Death, and Time; he could see deeper into the hearts of men, and into the graves of their cherished hopes; and he was destined to see further.

For a time the old house on the knob was deserted, but at length Gee-Boy and his family left the home in the town and climbed the knob to live. But the old boyish days

did not return; there were no illusions there; nor was there warmth; the old house was a box of sandal-wood emptied of its jewels and its odours, and filled with sharp-edged stones picked up from the margin of a half-frozen stream. Yet he did not despair. He still lived in hope, but in a faltering hope.

Little Grace fell sick one day. Her grandfather, the doctor, looked concerned, refused to name the disease, and sat silent by the bedside, watching. When Gee-Boy came home in the evening and heard the ill news, he chanced to lay an opened letter by his hat on the table before he tiptoed into the child's room. This letter was freighted with evil.

The two hundred copies of *Moods* that the publisher had not sent to the reviewers, were, in the course of a year, reduced by twenty or thirty; and the author received a paltry sum, together with the reminder that if in another year the sales did not justify publication and advertising, the edition, according to agreement, would be sold as waste paper. Fanfinx, passing

through the hall, saw the letter, and pried into it. There would have been no unpleasant consequences but a twitting, but for mention made of the price paid for the printing. When she read this, her Fury seized her.

"You paid for printing all that twaddle!" she exclaimed, when Gee-Boy came out of Grace's room.

He looked at her reproachfully. "I don't know why I love you when you talk like that."

"You needn't love me if you don't want to. I'm sorry you ever did—sorry! Do you hear?"

It was clear enough that he heard. "I've suspected it long," he said.

"Then why will you—oh, why *will* you—why *haven't* you better sense?"

"Fanfinx, I have lost your love; you never allowed me my daughter's; I had to find"——

"Nonsense! A man—a man to talk so! I should think you would have known — have known better." She stamped her foot in dumb rage.

Gee-Boy looked sadly out of the door. "It's no disgrace to be a poet," he said.

"No, but it is to be a dawdler. There's a distinction. If you had succeeded I would n't have said a word. But you did n't. Has a poet money? Not one in ten thousand. You have no more right to squander money this way than I have to buy diamonds. Two hundred and thirty dollars! If you were rich, it would have made no difference; but you are poor. Pigs and poetry! Disgusting! They say Sidney Cook is coming back from South America with a fortune in his pocket—all made in seven years. If you were like him"——

"You chose between us."

"And what a choice! If it were all to do ov"—she bit her lip.

Gee-Boy turned pale. "There are some things, Fanfinx, that should not be said, because they cannot be unsaid."

"I don't care. If it were not for our child!"

Gee-Boy was stunned. Fanfinx saw his

look, and for an instant was frightened; but went on, white, yet determined. "If people are disappointed when they marry, they should—should—now, you need n't look so; you've thought of it yourself."

"No," Gee-Boy replied, with a slow death-drag in his words, "I never dreamed of it."

"If I had not seen it in you before, I should not have dreamed of it. At any rate, I have endured enough."

"I never dreamed of such a thing." Gee-Boy uttered the words with the look of one who blunders along in the dark. "I have been disappointed in you sometimes, but I never"——

"If it were not for Grace!" Fanfinx wrung her hands.

Gee-Boy paused, and looked at her straight. "It's diphtheria," he said.

She sank down upon the stairs, and he would have helped her, but was motioned away.

Things happened quickly now. Parents

and grandparents, with two consulting physicians, watched the little life go out in a vain struggle for breath; and another event was added to Gee-Boy's sum of human experiences. He would have been stronger through it all if he could have comforted his wife; but she would have no consoler but her mother, and he must be dumb. When the child had been buried, Fanfinx would not come home, but lay sick next door, refusing even to see the man who was doubly bereft.

The days passed indistinctly. At times, out of nowhere, a voice cried to the lonely man—a voice suggestive of vague omissions. It was a soft resonant voice, full of confused melodies that warmed his heart, but blunted his sight. At length, by some accidental return and connection of impressions, vague even at first, he associated it with the contralto who sang at Grace's funeral; now, first, he knew it was an old voice to him. The discovery stopped him still in the street, until his abstraction was

suddenly broken by a man who approached and stopped.

It was Sidney Cook, with much of the wealth of South America displayed upon his expanded person. They greeted each other with formality, and parted soon without regret, perhaps even with incipient hostility. After they had walked a block, each turned and looked back at the other.

Not a week later Sidney Cook came riding up the knob on a sleek bay gelding, and reined in before Gee-Boy, who leaned on the gate, his unlighted pipe in his mouth.

"Fanfinx at home?"

"No."

"Be back soon?"

"Don't know."

"Where"——

"At her mother's." Gee-Boy jerked his head slightly to the left.

"I guess I'll—is she receiving callers—now?"

"You might go see."

The man at the gate made no reply to a mumbled answer, and the South American,

somewhat consciously urged his horse the few rods farther, and alighted at the doctor's horse-block. He came away in a quarter of an hour, and stopped reluctantly before the forbidding figure at the gate, to say,—

"Not receiving. Pretty much cut up over the death of the little girl. Strange that Fanfinx should be a mother; she was such a slip of a girl when I went away. Her mother seems aged."

A subtle light gleamed in Gee-Boy's eye, the glow of fire within; but he smothered it. "Time changes all things," he replied. And after a moment of oppressive silence, "Not married, yourself?"

"No. I suppose there is a wife for me somewhere; but the world is so big and she is so little that I cannot find her."

Gee-Boy's gaze was too steady and too searching for the South American, and he cantered away.

Yet he went to church Sunday after Sunday, sat two seats back of the doctor's pew, and finally was rewarded; twice afterward

that Gee-Boy knew of, he climbed the knob after nightfall. In the silent house the lone man ground his teeth impotently; he meditated fiercely day by day, and could act when the hour came. But his star had gone out.

Months went on, and Sidney's home visit of a year was nearing an end. At this time Gee-Boy felt himself the object of stolen glances and hidden whispers. There were fiends in him that raved and gnashed their teeth; but, after all, what reason had he? At last, one night when he came in late from the farm, he saw two figures sitting on a bench behind a lilac bush in the doctor's yard, and heard the low burr of voices. It was enough, it seemed. He went into the sitting-room, to a desk where the war relics of Auchophet-Man were kept, and handled something there. His blood surged through him in tides; and he was not afraid. But he paused to think; and the tides broke into trembling waves of brine, seething but uncertain. His head drooped. At length he

closed the drawer, and went again to look. The bench was empty. That night he wandered among the knobs till the intrusion of dawn.

XI

THE LAST WORD OF THE PINES

PERHAPS it all came remotely from the little game that Gee-Boy once played beneath the Blugg-Blugg Tree. In lonely times like that the human soul is beset by a stark staring sanity—a power of vision through merely adventitious surroundings and the hallucinations of substance into what, in truth, is. Then the spiritual and the physical assume their true relations, forgetful of estrangement; the two worlds merge.

The coming of such a deep-seeing sanity is no midsummer dream. Before, the brain is coarse, earthly, needing resetting unto finer harmonies; so a thousand little elf things tug cruelly at its outer fibres, compressing it as in a net; creasing it in minute, vibrating, burning meshes—expelling, refin-

ing, attuning; and all with a racking pain that fixes the eyes in a distant stare. The experience leaves an impression such as a die leaves on a coin—eternal; and symbolic, too, in that deep view through the adventitious, of the Eternal. Good reason, perhaps, that tragedy, on the stage or in life, moves the soul more than comedy; for out of the heaviest trials of life this experience is born.

It was not yet five of the morning; and thin wisps of mist curled up from the water, like steam from a caldron. There was a group of fishermen and wharfmen standing by; and a boat, full of ropes, poles, and grappling-hooks, was drawn up upon the muddy shore. Not far away, just at the mouth of the creek, was another boat, upturned, and caught in the branches of a half-sunken and water-logged tree. The stream swirled about it, making it rise and fall.

"We found her clinging to a branch eight

feet deep," Gee-Boy heard some one say in a low tone.

"And him?" queried another.

"The Lord knows," the first replied. "There are tracks running along the shore as far as the bend, where they take to the woods. His, probably. Saved himself, but not her. And they say there was a carriage waiting all night on the Kentucky shore, there where the road veers to the west to run down the river."

A man came along the bank from the west. In his hand he held a wet and muddy handkerchief, which he gave to Gee-Boy. In the corner, stitched in red silk, were the letters S. C.

And this was all anybody knew. Fanfinx had not been for Gee-Boy, and their mating was an error whose punishment was predestined.

The days that followed were very dumb days, and the man lay alone in the silent house. He had a feeling that the Julep-Devil came into the room occasionally, adminis-

tered to his wants, and went away. Upon his memory were dim traces of conversations that were fragmentary, and more or less incoherent—just such conversations as would befit the frivolous hostler. Once he saw the man tap his forehead strangely as he stood by the parting of the curtains, and mutter something; but this was in character, and not worthy of serious reflection. Besides, Gee-Boy had other matters to ponder. He had lain there on the bed three days now, and his torpor seemed to lapse by fits, and let him see things as they were. A veil seemed to be lifted, the veil that obscures mortal vision, just as in that soundless, bloodless battle which was a distant echo of that which had taken the life of Auchoph-et-Man. He heard, too, strange things; secret voices spoke to him from shadows, and bade him watch and listen. Once he saw Potchy sitting there by the fire in the dim room, taking off his boots and warming his toes, as was his custom, before the glowing coals. Gee-Boy raised up on his elbow and

watched the figure a long, long time; then the veil fell, blinding his sight. Again he fought over the battle beneath the Blugg-Blugg Tree; only it didn't end the same; the soldiers were unruly, behaved impishly, and finally faded away in the thin wreaths of smoke that rose in spirals from the ashes in the fireplace. Gee-Boy turned over and went to sleep.

When he awoke, a strange lightness was upon him; and the shutters were faintly shaken by the hurrying wind. An old impression came back to him; he thought of the leagues and leagues of wind that had blown through the pines, of the curving twisting current that went from them throughout the world, bearing their spicy odour.

Now he sat up in bed and listened. He could hear the old familiar voices, but with a new note of strange unrest. He stood feebly, and felt his way to the hall door, thence to the stair, and up to his old room. He put pillows and a blanket or two on the

window-seat, and tried to curl up as when a boy. The shutters were closed, but a slat was broken; and through it he could see the four dark shadowy sentinels, and between them the shrouded moonlight on the lawn, whitening the dried stalks of sunflowers and hollyhocks in the fence corners.

The wind was very capricious that night, flourishing about the corners of the house and cutting capers like a long restrained colt unloosed. It rattled a hanging waterspout under the eaves; it made a clatter with a disengaged sheet-iron cap on the south chimney; it scraped a limb of one of the pines against the roof. All this bang and flurry had a soothing effect on the man who listened, and he lay back at his ease. For a feeling began to come to him that the restful feeling was due not so much to the commotion, as to a presence just outside the window; and while he pondered upon it, he heard his name whispered,—

"Gee-Boy." Just as plain as that.

It startled him at first, but soon seemed

a natural thing. He listened to the voice again, and heard it in spite of the clatter of waterspout and chimney-cap. It was strangely confused with the rushing of the wind through the pines, and the tone was quiet and restful. In broken, interrupted phrases, each touched delicately with a lisp, the message came, giving word of a world where eyes see more clearly and hearts feel more truly.

He listened long, but the voice was gone. Softly, very softly, he opened the shutter and leaned out; but there was only the ragged lawn and the dried sunflowers showing between the pines, and the light of the moon filtered through thin autumnal clouds shining coldly over all.

And the soft woman's voice had said that eyes were clearer and hearts truer there. All the love Gee-Boy had ever felt for woman gathered into a flood in whose bursting there would be peril. The grave had sent its dead to soothe his wounded spirit; and he forgot all the pain of the past.

The long limb that rubbed the roof had grown in the years since he had climbed from it to the ground to fight the fight under the Blugg-Blugg Tree, and now it invited him to descend, this time to visit the new grave on the hill back of the orchard. When he reached it, the scrub oaks that straggled along the road leading from the creek were shuddering in the chill wind; and the low arbor-vitæ and firs among the rows of mounds bowed incessantly.

In his night vigil among the graves of those he had held dear, Gee-Boy heard the splash of a horse's hoofs from the ford below. Going to the rough stone wall, he leaped upon it and watched until horse and rider came into view around the hill. The animal snorted and stopped stock still, looking steadily ahead at the motionless figure, then turned and fled, splashing noisily through the ford again, and into the woods beyond.

Gee-Boy wondered but little about the night rider as he retraced his steps; he wondered only whether he should hear again the voice

in the pines before the gray of morning began to suffuse the sky. Reaching the tree, he put a porch chair against it, and climbed painfully up. Once in his room again, he closed the shutters and listened; but there was no whisper but that of the pines.

A day went by, and a night; the watcher heard the voice again as he crouched in the window and peered through the broken shutter.

"If you were free, as I am free"—it said; and the broken phrases, touched delicately with a lisp, were lost in the clatter of the loosened chimney-cap, the hanging water-spout, and the bough rubbing on the shingles. He listened anxiously. For days he had believed that Fanfinx had been more tricked than persuaded; and now he hoped to hear her word for it come slipping through the shutters, in some pause of the various clatters the wind made. And it came, softly, but unmistakably; and died away in a faint tinkle of happy laughter.

Rousing himself, the watcher threw open

the shutter, only to see the accustomed scene. A spring of hate was welling up in the mountain of his love.

Some obscure impulse drove him out upon the roof again, along the eaves to the bough, down to the ground, through the orchard, down the hill and up the opposite one to the little burying-ground. He paused under the half-naked scrub oaks, leaped the rough stone wall, and was by the new mound of yellow clay. What then? Why had he come? He did not know; only, he did not want that other to come and mourn over her grave.

The destined event came on the instant, like the footfalls of Fate; there was a splashing of a horse's hoofs in the ford below.

Under impulse of maniacal instinct, Gee-Boy stooped and ran along a row of firs to the stone wall, behind which he crouched, listening to the horse ascending the hill. He could hear the rider urging on the reluctant animal with voice, heel, and whip; and when they reached the turn where they had stopped the night before, again there was

a terrified snort and the noise of hoofs planted with final decision. Again the sound of voice, heel, and whip, until the horse, nerving himself for a dash past the place, came pounding up the road. At once Gee-Boy leaped upon the wall, waved his arms, and shrieked with laughter.

Things happened quickly then. The horse turned, and dashed back over its path, its rider swerving from side to side; in an instant they were past the turn, a sharp one at the bottom of the hill, just where the road took to the water, and on the edge of it was a great bowlder, which horse and rider could hardly escape. There was only time to think when a fall came—a sound as if the horse had tumbled over the stone; and another as of a human life crushed out. Gee-Boy listened a moment. There was a struggle and all was still. With pale face and trembling limbs he ran down the hill, up again on the other side, climbed to his room, and closed the shutters behind him.

The wind was hissing now in the pines,

and the clatter of the chimney-cap and the loosened gutter became furious. Peering through the broken shutter, Gee-Boy felt the approach of an intangible presence. A white wraith interposed its filmy substance between him and the nearest pine.

"Gee-Boy, I am afraid," faltered the voice.

The wraith fled away; Gee-Boy pushed the shutter ajar, just far enough for a little wider view without. Now the voice came again from deep in the pines—the tremulous voice of a woman wringing her hands. "Gee-Boy," it wept, "I am afraid—so, so afraid." Again a silence, palpitating with dread, and the voice broke out in passion, "He's crushed against a stone; he will carry me over the dark river. I am afraid—afraid—so"——

There was a final cry of terror, a cold mocking laugh; and a sense of the flight of two spirits in the leagues on leagues of wind that blew through the pines.

Gee-Boy clutched the casement; his whole being seemed to slip out and away from

him. He made one last effort to rouse himself, and even violently pushed open the shutter; but the wind slammed it to with bang and clatter, and he fell helpless and senseless to the floor.

When the world dawned upon him again, he had the feeling that there had been an incredible lapse of time, and that all worth doing and living for was gone; a supreme indifference to himself and the world possessed him. He was lying in the big bed in the sitting-room; there was a low blaze of logs in the fireplace; the porch door was open, and he saw the Julep-Devil sitting in the big hickory chair.

"Daft, clean daft!" this person was saying, between puffs of his short pipe. "Laid there, he did, on the bed fer days after his wife was drowned, and stared at the wall. Had to mourn 'cause she was his wife, I reckon; but she wasn't much to mourn fer. There was always sompin' that wasn't there about that woman, an' I think he knowed it. Any-

way, he went to his old room upstairs one night; he was took bad, as anybody could see. The second mornin' I found him layin' on the floor there, 'thout no more life in 'im than a dornick—same mornin' Sid Cook was found by the big bowlder with his horse layin' on top o' him. Daft, clean daft! An' I'm a-tellin' yuh"— here the speaker lowered his voice—"'at it runs in the fambly. Don't I 'member, years ago, lemme see—twenty-seven years ago come next January, 'at his granmammy went round with 'er hands t'er head, sayin', 'Lost, lost!' She's dead, long dead. She was a good woman, God rest her soul! but daft, clean daft! An' this boy is like her to a *t*. Why, onct"——

Gee-Boy covered his head, turned his face to the wall, and shut out the monotone.

An indifference to himself and the world! That was his mood; for emotions were burned out, and brain and body were weary. But while brain and body, pressure removed and rest complete, gained fibre in the slow

drag of bed-ridden days, his heart recovered no jot of power to feel. In this state, Gee-Boy's whole past became to him merely an objective series of events, events which he regarded coldly, and as if far away, not parts of himself: his very life, too, came to be viewed in the same remote objectivity—a thing to be pondered upon. As one who comes upon the low lying beach of the sea or a great lake sometimes sees, by some trick of vision, the watery expanse lying much lower, as if sunk hundreds of feet beneath its accustomed level, and sees ships not distant as if far away, and standing still with idle sails, in a thin mist, so he saw his own being and his own being's history. The world had been too much with him after the memory of his first childish speculation has grown dim; and now the problem of his own existence as a living soul and the existence of the big universe about him came again for solution, demanding the dispassionate thought of his mature years. Philosophy, no doubt, would have its con-

solations; and therefore, in his manhood, he would return to the perplexities of his childhood.

In time he left his bed, and was, physically, something like himself again. One day he drew what money he had in bank, wrote a long letter to his lawyer, piled all the household goods in the dark unused parlour, and filled a valise with a few articles of clothing, which he set aside until night should fall. Sitting on the porch steps, he ate a bowl of bread and milk, watched for a long time the lights appear in the widespread picture before him, and with his burden swung over his back with a cane, left the yard and took the road that wound down to the west among the knobs—those knobs that he had loved so well, and that were to know his tread no more for twenty years.

XII

THE LITTLE ROOM

IF you turn to the left out of the Boulevard St. Michel at a certain place, you come into a short street with a gray mountain at its end, or what was a gray mountain, doubtless; but the temple in it from the beginning has been cut out and the refuse carted away. You behold the Pantheon. Here, nowadays, you may trample on the dust of Victor Hugo, if you like. But if you prefer to observe the writhing of the quick, rather than to trample upon the helpless dead, take the street a little to the right of the Sorbonne, which is just across the way, and pass into the narrow Rue Valette. If it be day, the big gateway at No. 21 stands open; if night, you have an open sesame in a certain knock; the portal opens wide, and closes behind you with a bang.

The Little Room

Within is a place where nothing much ever happens. A court, long and narrow; on the farther side, a high old house, once aristocratic perhaps, now venerable. Beyond this, a garden, an ideal place in which to sip your coffee and smoke a cigarette. The narrow stair within the house leads you up to the top, and you grope along to a door opening into a double apartment overlooking the court. Here is a table strewn with papers and books; in a recess, a bed. A grate is opposite the window—a dying fire within. Between it and the bed is a door opening into a little kitchen. You hear the shuffle of papers, the scratch of a pen, the movement of a book; perhaps a sigh. And this is all that ever happens in that melancholy chamber. At least it was so years ago.

The court, as you see it from the room, is bounded on three sides by plastered walls topped by roofs of various slants, and cut by balconied windows of irregular shapes. On one side the building projects, the projection having a farther projection, narrow

like a column, perhaps containing a winding stair—the whole nearly closing that end of the court. On the top of this column, or stair-well, is a little room whose overhanging walls are supported by brackets. There are two windows, a chimney, and a roof like an inverted ash-hopper. Here, long ago, nothing ever happened—nothing but the shuffle of papers, the scratching of a pen, the movement of books. But, I fancy, never a sigh. This made the difference between a man who knew everything and a man who tried to know everything; between one who was in the confidences of the Creator, and one who was not.

Here in the house of Etienne de la Forge, Hell was first paved with the bones of infants who, born with an infusion of the plague of Adam, went to damnation for their own fault, not from his. This is one of the eternal verities. Did not Calvin say it? And in this little room! And with what grim iron-featured humour must he have warned the dogmatic of the coming of his heresies!

Thick-headed Nicholas Cop, newly made a regent of the Sorbonne and confronted with the horror of pronouncing an oration, induced the Genevan (an easy task, doubtless) to prepare the document for him. And it was a defence of the Reformation! Fancy the Sorbonists, the author being known, rushing through the big gate of Etienne de la Forge, up the sky-aspiring stair to the little room under the inverted ash-hopper, searching under the table and under the bed for the cursed heretic and his heretical papers. But an ever-wise Providence had not omitted prudence from the qualities of Calvin, and on this occasion he contrived to be elsewhere with the documents containing the tenets now enjoying so peaceful a repose in the cemetery for dead dogmas. And Calvin is dead, too! His soul is with the saints, we trust.

All was otherwise with the inhabitant of the double apartment overlooking the court. The Sorbonists cared not a red for him. On his table lay two thin volumes, one a

thesis for his doctor's degree at Heidelberg—*Die Entstehungsgeschichte des Agnosticismus;* the other, a labour of conviction, *Platos Einwirkung auf dem neueren Idealismus*, both having his name upon the title-pages; and under his folded hands lay a thick pile of sheets, his *magnum opus*, an epoch-making volume, if the world had only known it—one that was to demolish the temples of faith and build a new age-defying conception of God and his designs. And no one demurred.

But the work did not come on well. The brain impulses, trained from the early activity displayed in the enunciation of the dictum, "I am me," down through the unsystematic groping in poetic labyrinths and the conscious threading of metaphysical paths in the university, were losing their power to shoot up, out, down, and about, descrying relations, detecting identities, separating actualities from illusions. They stopped short of discovery. Doubtless they had not pierced all the thinker's brain; there were

mental regions there yet unexplored by the darting spirals and zigzag molecular activities; there was room in the unpierced portion of the hemispheres for these impulses to meet and make all relations complete; and for time unreckoned the lonely scholar sat, head propped in hands, trying to advance the weary energies into new paths. But day unto day uttered no speech, and night unto night showed no knowledge. Out of the window there was the little room of Calvin; and beyond it the dome of the Pantheon, showing airily against the sky in the early gray of morning. The scholar's face was old, his hair threaded with white, his eyes sunken. He had reached the end.

The end merely; not completion. Two years before he had come from Germany to this nook in the Latin Quarter of Paris, searching for the vigour he fancied would be inspired by new surroundings in the old city of passionate history. Here some part of every battle of human life had been fought out; was it not meet that the problem of

post-human life should be solved here too? And that was the lone scholar's task—to find out and set down whatsoever things were true about the here and the hereafter. His rubs and knocks against the unyielding world had conspired to drive away all belief in caprice as an attribute of deity, all confidence in a Providence wise or unwise, all hope of a tempering of the wind of eternal destiny to the shorn lamb. Yet God could not be cruel. The cruelty of nature could not be his wilful doing, but rather the working out of a law inherent in himself, a part of himself, a law that he could no more arrest than human creatures can arrest the diseases that gnaw upon them. An impossibility is as impossible to God as to man—an old thought come back with the strength of new conviction; the cry of a young soul lost in the quicksand! What had life been since but a continuation of that cry, accompanied by raillery at divine impotence, until the coming of the saving thought that God is slowly struggling upward for the sake

of the universe within him, evolving the soul of man to participation in the God-head for the perfect, though infinitely distant, life hereafter—a life whose fulness is to be obtained, not by divine fiat, but by slow process of law? Hence, neither punishment nor reward in the beyond; only the struggle, as here, with the goal of a perfect life somewhere, sometime.

This, the task; simple, and forever impossible! The proofs, the mathematically accurate demonstration, refused to come; the long-strained nerve impulses failed to push themselves farther into unexplored mental regions, and back the thinker fell into the pit of agnosticism, with not the faintest glow of the ideal above him. He was young, but his face was old, his hair threaded with white, his eyes sunken. He had reached the end. He turned feebly, grasped the mass of manuscript and tossed it upon the low fire in the grate. He watched the scattered sheets ignite. A tirade against agnosticism was the first to curl its white straight edges

into a black crumpled fringe; then an attack upon Calvin and his damnation of babes; then Jonathan Edwards had his turn; and so to the end—a black mass of stuff that sent stray flakes flying up the chimney. The watcher stared fixedly into the grate; a big bell began to beat—one stroke, two, the succession to twelve. Staggering up from his last defeat, the man looked out the window. There was the dome of the Pantheon, and the room of the man who knew, or thought he knew, famed forever, and for the cruelest of errors. The bed in the corner swayed about; but wavering toward it, the defeated one caught it as it swam near him, and cast himself upon it. And that was all that ever happened in the little room.

Toward the decline of the following day the man awoke, recollected himself, not without difficulty, made his toilet with unusual care, and with no look into the grate, went into the street. The air was fresh and keen. A faint joy in physical existence began to bubble in him—the body! He was sure of that

and of the present world; there was nothing after it, perhaps; but he did not know, nor care. After eating a trifle and drinking a few drops of wine, he wandered forth, free, whither his capricious feet might lead him. By and by he came to a place where three soldiers and a countryman were eagerly talking before a great placard displaying inducements for recruiting. He paused. His father had been a soldier. He spoke to one of the men in uniform, and was inspected by all, narrowly.

"And what age is monsieur?"

The reply was received with polite incredulity, a lifted eyebrow or so.

"It would do no harm to try," said the soldier. "Enter, if you please, monsieur; the officer is about to close the bureau."

The door stood open. A lieutenant in fatigue dress was filing papers in a desk. As he raised his hand to pull down the lid, a shadow fell along the floor.

XIII

BEFORE THE CHARGE

THE jungle was impenetrably thick; and the moist suffocating heat rose from the fetid pools and rank vegetation, spreading itself about in layers that the wind, which blew gently above the trees, could not drive away. All about were closely crowded cocoa-palms, mangoes and limes; between grew a thousand tropical grasses and shrubs, created to catch the foot in incessant tangles. The birds had fled—all but a few parrots that screamed in the tree tops, and the vultures that wheeled far above; while beneath, in the brush, thousands of land-crabs scuttled noisily.

Winding through the thick sweltering forest was a deep-sunken road, clogged with thousands of marching soldiers, waggon-trains, and detachments of artillery, all

in inextricable confusion. The cracking of whips, the curses of angry drivers urging on their jaded, thirsty horses through the sticky clay, the impatient shouts of mounted aids pressing ahead of the throng, and the whirl and pop of Mauser bullets—by these sounds one could know how the jungle teemed with life and death.

By and by the sunken road came out into a more open place on the slope of a little hill, below which, obscured by a high bank and tall, thick trees, lay a stream; beyond this, a valley; and beyond this again, another hill, topped with a blue blockhouse surrounded by a line of yellow earthworks. In spite of the rustle of bullets, which struck many down, some of the troops deployed to right and left, making a thin line along the bank, and crossed to the shelter of the one opposite. They were fainting from weariness, begrimed with dirt and sweat; their tongues were parched and black, their throats dry, their voices raucous; they drank the fever-laden water of the stream with rabid ardour,

and lay down in the tall grass or crouched in the bush to obey one order, the only one they were to receive that day—not to shoot, just to wait, under fire, until human endurance could endure no longer.

It was here that The One and The Other met.

The One, being a mere soldier, and in Cuban uniform at that, was of no consequence; he came to a salute when The Other looked steadily and disapprovingly at him, and stood so in spite of the incessant bullets that cut the grass about him.

The Other, having a sword in his hand, returned the salute gravely. "You don't belong to us," he said. "What are you doing here?"

"I don't know, sir; I must have got lost in the shuffle. Besides, I want to be with my own people."

"Go to your regiment."

The One's hand dropped, and he glanced about hesitatingly. Again he came to a salute. "Where is it, sir?" he asked.

The Other looked stern a moment; then laughed. "Lie down," he commanded.

Into the tall burning grass, which kept the breeze away, dropped The One, and The Other too, very strangely and mysteriously. "I've got it," he exclaimed, hoarsely. "In the leg. Tie it up, will you?"

Half a dozen of his own men came crawling up, but he accepted the ministrations of The One, who cut away what of his trousers the jungle's thorns had left, and bound up the wounded leg. "Can you move it?" he asked.

"Yes; but it's rather numb."

"I'll rub it, Captain. You'll need it when orders come. And then we won't do a thing to 'em."

"Meanwhile—God! Look at that!"

Two red-cross men were carrying a wounded man on a stretcher to the sheltered bank beyond the stream, where a line of dead and dying were lying in an orderly row, when a bullet struck the foremost man in the back.

"Sharpshooters! They're in the trees all around us. Smokeless powder! Hell!"

The Other thrust away The One and tried to rise, but his leg was yet useless. "It *is* Hell," he said. "And no orders. Why doesn't old Cloud Compeller let us move?"

The bullets went rustling by, cutting the grass, plunking into the trees, and plunging into the jungle and the tangled brigades within them. Across the stream the line of dead and wounded was steadily growing. Men went fearlessly to and fro carrying heavy stretchers; and aids galloped up and down on useless missions. A bullet from the blue blockhouse came spitting by The One's ear. He ducked. "It's a bluxy world," he said.

"What's that?" asked The Other, looking at him sharply.

"A strange world, I said."

"A rare thing—to dodge Mauser bullets and to moralize at the same time."

"No time fitter. Besides, I've done the like all my life. What's all this rumpus about, anyway? What are we here for?

Was life given us to throw away? And those we take—did God give them for us to destroy? Are we the sheep of his pasture, or they? Which side is doing God's will? And what is His will? — if anybody knows. Who told us to beat our ploughshares into swords?"

"You're all wrong," said The Other, rubbing and beating his leg, and drawing it painfully up and down. "There is a theory of life"——

"Only one? Why, man, the palms of this jungle are not more numerous. It isn't a theory I want. I want to know for certain what's what."

"Listen now. I'm older than you—ten years, maybe. I've more than half a century behind me; and I've gone up and down the world a bit. There is a philosophy of life"——

"I know it; and it is as good as any other, and any other is as good as it. Philosophy is the apotheosis of guess-work. A plague upon it all!"

"Listen, sir. I am your superior officer,

and I command you. (He set his teeth to hide a grim dirty grin.) You do not respect authority. When God spoke from the burning bush, suppose Moses had"——

"Not a parallel case, Captain; you don't intend to compare me to Moses, do you?"

The Other laughed, and dodged at once. He rubbed his leg thoughtfully and stretched it out. Then he looked up at the soaring vultures. A land-crab went scuttling through the grass toward a dead soldier who lay a few feet away. "Poor fellow!" The Other mused. "He needs no theory of life. And the worst of it is that, to be like him, we must become food for the vultures and the land-crabs."

"That will come soon enough. Look at the stream there and the file of men in the shelter of the bank; perfect alignment, isn't it? I've been in many a hot scrimmage, but this is the worst yet; lying still in battle is no cinch. Must we lie here and be shot like wild beasts in a trap?"

"Many a hot scrimmage?"

"Yes, I've fought with the Tommies in India. I've had my shot at Fuzzy-Wuz; and I carry three scars from his spear. I've been with the French in Senegambia. I've led a company in Venezuela and a regiment in Honduras. I've sailed all seas; I've travelled all lands—and with puzzles for companions. I've been a mighty hunter before the Lord—hunting a way to live in two worlds at once; this one, and the next."

"Fool! Fool! Fool!"

"I've known all faiths. I've lived all lives. I've found them all hollow. I've formulated a faith of my own, and burned it up, so other fools couldn't read it. Two worlds! We get them mixed up when we theorise, for sometimes we can't tell the one from the other; one seems to encroach upon the other, to give us vague glimpses, as we see a ship in the mist, with a high cliff-shore beyond; we make out spars, and shout, and ask what she is and where bound; we get a few blurred words for answer, but don't know what they are, nor whether they are

replies from the ship or echoes from the cliff."

The Other deigned no reply; The One rambled on with little coherence.

"A vague illustration, no doubt. I'm not quite sure what I mean. How could I? And if I could, how could I say it with my throat parched and the bullets screaming death songs? Anyway, in this somnambulistic journey called life the two worlds get mixed up. We live in one, and try to live in the other, yet shunning the only way. My earliest recollections are of these things. I had my notion of how things ought to be, and I found them otherwise. Why do we fight against disillusion? I found my spirit revolting against the indomitable Something that thwarted my will. I kicked against the Infinite; and the Infinite, unbecomingly, kicked against me. I couldn't know and do what I desired; power was denied to such a worm as I. And there you are! In boyhood I had my little problems, and tried to solve them; and the whole eternal fixity of things stood by and jeered at me. We have so

many brute laws in the universe, and they teach themselves to us by paying out their penalties. We bruise ourselves against Fate. We make our best endeavour to know the law of Heaven, and we live by it; but Fate opposes us, and Heaven looks on and will not take our part. We aspire to nobleness and honour and perfection; and the great Something whose baubles we are seems to encourage venality and dishonour and peccancy. Those of us who try to do and to be, are held up to the scorn of those who idle. Those of us who dream, are called fools by those who lie wallowing in the muck. They see our gaze in the clouds, and they tap their heads. Then we love; we deify one person—the wrong person, for she is more sordid than all the rest; is enamoured of gew-gaws and fine trappings, and so wallows in her own peculiar muck, with other wallowers. This disillusion is killing. The mind is strained beyond the tension of life here below; it feels wounds too deep for Time to heal; it knows a world-grief, and hears voices

from the Beyond. Again, people tap their foreheads and look wise. The blatant fools don't know that dullness is its own reward. But the strain passes; the flesh is heavy, and drags the mind down to its level. Then we go out to wander, and try to mould our souls to the Heavenly Image, and the same old world keeps us down to its own. Even in our desire we are alone. We are unique because we aspire. It is surprising how much contentment reigns here below. It is not currently believed, but man is a contented sort of beast. If the pot boils, he rests. The few discontents—they are our hope. You see them all along the world's march—mountain peaks! Socrates! Christ! And there are some little hillocks, unhappy little hillocks, that nobody sees. They strive, but they can't add a cubit to their stature. They are not tall enough to plant a beacon on; they are nothing but hillocks. A torrent sweeps down, or an avalanche, and they are no more. They pass away wishing they were peaks. And the peaks themselves have

their trials—the lightning rends them; they reach their heads to Heaven for help, and Heaven strikes them in the face. And they are more alone than the hillocks; the world-procession passes on, and refuses to look; it sees them only when the backward distance gives them perspective. Then strange and untruthful visions are had of them, and the multitude bows down and worships and tells fables about them; and religion, worn out, becomes mythology; cant begins, the incredulous scoff, the world becomes weary; and believing nothing, pines for something to believe—vain desire, when there is nothing to believe! So we write over the doors of our unbuilt temples, 'I don't know,' and over our neighbour's we write, 'Neither do you'; and here ends our philosophy."

"Well, 'God's in His heaven; all's right'"——

"Maybe. We may awake from our sleep; but I don't know—I don't know. We've been told on good authority that they didn't 'know everything down in Judee.'"

"Your case is sad; yet I do not believe in your doctrine of discontent—not for myself anyway."

"A contented man is either a lout or one resigned to failure."

"Let me be one or the other, then. My way is to do my daily duty—to live, to work, to fight, to love my wife and children, and to watch the big procession go by; this satisfies me. What is the use of striving after the unattainable? It is enough to look upon the wonders about us. Life is worth while for that alone. If all our questions are to be answered hereafter, will not the revelations give us more pleasure than if we knew them here? If we knew them now, there would be no Unknowable, and the mystery of life would be dispelled. Be satisfied with one world. Don't aspire to divinity."

"But perhaps they are not to be answered hereafter."

"Then what's the use of worrying? Make your wonder at the world a pleasure, not a

pain. Let it be an inspiration, not a discouragement. Do you see the vultures up there? Do you hear the land-crabs at that soldier? Do you hear the bullets singing? These are a part of the world procession. I like to see these things. Do you remember the mist here in the jungle last night? And the thousand unaccustomed noises? These too. And the transports off the coast, and the horses swimming to shore? And the black smoke of the warships? And the ocean and the sky? These too. And there's the blue blockhouse on the hill. It must be taken in spite of all the powers of Hell. And if orders don't come soon, we'll take it without orders. That will be life too—a good life to live, and a good death to die. I've done my work thus far; if I can do no more, then that will be enough."

The whirl of flying bullets suddenly shifted to one side, and rose to an impetuous crescendo.

"What's broke loose now?" said The Other, rising and looking about.

A big blundering balloon hung low over the tree-tops, drawing the full fire of the enemy.

"We can't stand this long," he went on to say. "There will be a break somewhere, and it will be forward." Giving sharp orders to his men, some of whose fiery faces and staring eyes were peering above the grass, to lie down and stay down, he again dropped beside The One, to wait. The air grew hotter, and black tongues stuck out from parched mouths. The two crawled through the heat to the stream, and lapped up their fill of the sickly water, and crawled back.

"Now listen," said The Other. "This can't continue long. Something is going to happen, and I have a bit to say. I knew a man like you once, or rather, a boy. He was a pupil of mine before I went to West Point. A strange child! Made names for people and things. Tried to do impossible things. When he was growing up, the inevitable girl question arose, and out of it, more than he knew, grew a discontent like yours.

There were two girls in this case. One was modest and true, a glory to womanhood. The other was devilish. Could look unutterable things, but her heart was cold. Could feign any emotion to gain her end. And her end was this boy. She gained him by a lie —a lie plain and brazen. Everybody knew of it, and knew it was a lie—all but him. He had always courted illusions, and this was the greatest of them all. There was a note found, a silly school-girl note, written by her rival to him. She, the false one, this she-devil, gave it to a suitor of hers and persuaded him to print it in his father's paper, and say her rival had induced him so that she might flaunt her conquest. She told no lie herself; she got a soft-hearted and soft-brained male creature to do it—clever! A trifle, a mere pebble, but it turned a stream. They married, these two, the she-devil and the boy who loved illusions. They say she led him a race. The other suitor, he of the soft heart and the soft brain, came back after a time from the ends of the world,

whither he had fled in despair. Then her life went out in a tragedy, and the lover's; and the husband's reason, they say, though I don't know. Maybe. He wasn't well-balanced. To be in perfect balance is to have a certain amount of selfishness and stupidity; he had neither. But he went away—nobody knew where, but me. Do you understand?"

The One had sunk face down on the ground and lay there in silence. The bullets were around them as thickly as before. One of The Other's men suddenly leaped up and fell back, breathing out his life with a sigh of infinite relief and content. A dozen more of the company lay still or writhing.

"What can't be endured must be cured," said The Other, rising. "Let's make our own orders."

At that moment a horseman appeared in the jungle, and said to somebody, "If you don't want to advance, then let my men and me." He wore a sombrero with a spotted blue handkerchief tied about it. His men pushed through with a rush.

"Get up," The Other said to the recumbent figure, giving it a nudge with his foot. Then he shouted an order to his men that brought them to their feet.

The One got up. He hardly knew what was happening, so the fury of life and of battle was working in him. Soon they were in the stream, The Other limping on and cheering his men. They crossed, pushed through bushes and trees, and were at the bottom of the basin beyond which rose the hill, whose surface was tangled with long grass and whose top upbore the deadly blockhouse with its line of yellow earthworks. They were few, these men in the van; but there were teeming thousands behind them and the horseman with the sombrero in front. They toiled on slowly in the intolerable heat and the matted grass, the bullets tearing up the earth in front, and dropping them one by one.

Suddenly The Other plunged forward and fell; and the company passed over. He gasped, and spit a little blood. "Go on,

Gee-Boy, go on, and—good-bye." There was an instant of struggle, then a sigh, and quiet.

The One laid him straight, placed his sword by his side, and saying in a voice hoarse with grief and thirst, "Good-bye, Professor," struggled on alone.

XIV

THE WORLD GOES BY

NOT the least labor of Time is to round up all things, to prove the value of trifles once cast away, to bring success, or resignation with ripened wisdom, after many failures. A familiar truth, this, with which to conclude the whole matter.

Gee-Boy toiled painfully through the dusk and under the stars, up the long winding road that climbed the knob with the old sentinelled house a-top. Through the years of his absence there had been a succession of tenants; who was there now, he knew not, being content with the small quarterly remittance from his lawyer. On his return he visited the old place first, because it was the scene of his earliest and dearest recollections, the scene of his childhood's illusions; and some of his disillusions. And above it, his star still beckoned.

At the summit he paused and leaned heavily on the gate, breathing hard, and reflecting that a half-healed bullet wound in the lungs aids one but little in climbing a hill. There were the old pines, older now, but not perceptibly larger, still with a carpet of cones and leaves beneath them; and the old house, placid and dignified in its age, just beyond. Above, the same sky; below, the same town and the same broad river; beyond, the same thriving city, with a starry sparkle here and there.

"Yes, I am me," Gee-Boy panted; "more's the pity. It would have been better if I had been somebody else, even if I had never found it out. It's dangerous business—this hitching a fellow's waggon to a star; he is certain to knock off the tops of a few hills and get a bad bumping. And here I am at the old place again. The difficulty is"——

He paused for breath, and did not resume aloud. It was the necessity of turning out the tenants that troubled him, now that an irresistible yearning to live in the old home

and to end his days there, had seized him. Good tenants, too, who paid their rent promptly, although from something his lawyer had written him while he was in the hospital, he supposed them to be people in reduced circumstances. They, too, might be attached to the place, with its wealth of orchard and pasture, its wide and varied prospect of field, town, river, city, sky. His claim, however, was a prior one, and his purpose in life much more serious and philosophical, being the result, as it was, of many years of grafting and pruning his little tree of knowledge—no less a purpose, in fact, than to watch the world-procession go by, and to consider this a sufficient cause for being. We reach a little wisdom at last, when in ripeness of life we sit down to wait with wonder and contentment the inevitable summons. Other purposes were corollaries. To give up the impossible (he admitted the influence of the captain-professor), to submit to the inevitable necessity, to be content with living in one world at a time, to regard the

blasting of an illusion as a thing of no consequence, to forget his grief at being made the sport of things, to assert nothing fixedly about this enigmatical world, nor to admit others' belief to be true, yet to hope for every thing good—these! And these too,—to work, to fight, if necessary, as he had already done, like his father before him, and to lo—no, not to love; there was no one to love.

Though the articles of this creed gave him that feeling of rest and security that comes to one who has been suddenly made certain, after long striving, of his basic principles, yet, as he discovered on reflection, there was not one but had had its roots deep in the past. The force, the strength of his view, it was, that was new; each distinct conviction was old, a thing once cast away, happily found again, and valued as it deserved; a thought once banished, now returned "with renewed majesty." Had not life been a struggle between the two parts of the poem *Moods*? Each depression had brought its feeling of the worthlessness of life; con-

trariwise, each ecstasy at the marvel of his own existence, at that of all the whirling worlds, reacting upon itself, had so magnified his wonder at it all, that life seemed worth living for this privilege alone—to watch the world go by. How often thought of it in times long gone! how often forgotten! how gladly received in his mind now for a finality, and enthroned there! And the corollary, to give up the impossible—old too! Had not——

From the house there came the low deep tones of a piano's bass notes, then a sombre chord or two in the middle register, and a voice joined in—a rich voice, not powerful, but with all the melancholy of a woman who has lived and loved, with all the sweetness of one who has suffered and has not been embittered. It was a voice that made the watcher at the gate start with surprise, then bow his head upon his arms as they rested on the gate. He listened to the old song, the song of lost love, with the undermelody bursting into occasional fits of

passion in the pauses. For more than twenty years his heart had sung it. He remained still until the music had long died away and a step sounded on the stone flagging leading down from the house. He looked up. She stood before him there in the starlight.

"You have a stranger without your gates," he said.

She came near and looked into his face. He felt his youth surging up within him.

"Gee-Boy," she said, and undid the latch.

He entered, walked with her to the little Greek porch, sat down on its edge, felt again the old worn stone steps beneath his feet, smelled again the odour of the pines, saw the dim night-prospect under the branches.

"All these years, Ruth—what have you done?"

"Waited—just waited; that is the woman's part."

"It's the man's part, too, if he only knew it. What do we get for all our striving?—just resignation to wait until what we want be given to us, or refused. If we could only

wait calmly, restfully, with perfect companionship, enjoying what we are and what we behold in the big universe, content at last, if these be all!"

Ruth looked up to where the black bulk of the pines' foliage was edged with bunches of the spiky leaves—just a fringe of Japanese decoration silhouetted against the night sky; and drew in her fill of the balsam. "It's a good place to wait—this hill," she said.

"I've come many a long day's journey to wait here," he returned. "Here my life began, and here I had my first notion of what life is—an enchantment, a dream, in which caprice rules. Then it became an incongruity, a puzzle; then a prison with an invisible jailer; then a despair—even a death. Years followed in which life was a patched beggar wandering drunkenly in a labyrinth. Now it is a man sitting on a hill, resigned to his own ignorance and impotence, but filled with a pagan-like reverence for the big world-procession and the power behind it—if there be a power

behind it; a man, and a woman, too, who have learned more of themselves than they knew when they were young. There they wait, these two, and if there be more hereafter—well!"

There was a clicking at the gate-latch. An old bent form came hobbling through.

"An old friend of yours," Ruth explained.

"I don't recognize him there in the dark."

"Tom Hook."

"The Julep-Devil!"

"He works for mother and me—a little; as much as he is able. Cares for our horses, drives down into town or out to the farm, feeds the chickens, all feebly and poorly; but we can't turn him away. He has had no home but this and—one other; his path has not been strewn with flowers. See here, Tom."

The old man approached timorously.

"Do you know who this is?" asked Ruth.

He raised his hand from force of habit, as if to screen his eyes, looked long and earnestly, then recovered himself. "Don't know as I do," he answered, apologetically.

"I cain't see as good as I used to could."

"Then you don't know me," said Gee-Boy.

At the sound of the voice the old man began to tremble and to sink down upon the stone steps, where he began to cry and to chatter a feeble tremolo. "Back again after all these years. I never b'lieved you'd come; no sir-ee. An' after so long, so many years. How do yuh come on? Only middlin', eh? Well, well! a heap o' things has happened—particular to me. I reckon Miss Ruth told yuh?" The old man wiped the tears from his eyes.

"N-no," doubtfully.

"Tell him," said Ruth.

Tom shifted his position uneasily. "It don't seem right t' tell yuh miseries as soon as yuh come back; but then I'd a heap ruther tell yuh'n have some other feller tell yuh. Understand, don't yuh? 'Druther tell yuh myself."

The old man leaned back against the pillar, and looked up at Ruth and Gee-Boy. There was a patch of moonlight on his face, and

a strange expression, too, a mixture of shame-faced defiance and of apology. He had had his own life to live, in his own way; let us conclude his story here.

"Well, sir, I been in the pen," he said.

"What?"

"Yessir, in state prison." He twirled his hat nervously.

"Yessir, at Jeff. Six months."

"What—you, Tom Hook? Why, what did you do?"

The look of mingled defiance and apology flashed away, and the old man wept bitterly a moment, then dried his tears. "Yessir, me, me. I never would a-thought it, but it's so. What 'u'd my ole mother think if she was alive? Yuh see, I didn't lay on no featherbed after you went away. I'd kinder got used to yore easy way o' doin' (you wasn't no harder on yer hands 'n whut yer father was), an' it 'peared like I could n't git no stiddy job, being old, and not as stout as I used to was; seventy-eight, now, come next October. I worked in one o' the steam-

boat yards a spell, an' got the sack; an' then on a farm in the spring o' the year, an' then here an' there in town an' out, an' onct across the river, but nothin' stiddy. When winter come on I couldn't git no job nowhere fer long, an' I tuck t' the woods. I built a cabin o' driftwood an' an ole yawl between the knob an' the river, an' fixed up a contrapshun t' cook my vittles on. I staid there when I had any grub, an' when I hadn't none, I went out t' forage. At the mill they give me some meal for nursin' a sick horse; I got some coffee an' sugar from a grocery fer pilin' cord-wood in the cellar; an' I went on a-doin' that-a-way. By an' by I couldn't git nothin' t' do, an' I was hungry. I come around the corner of the lower market-house one day; an' it was winter, an' the stalls all empty but a butcher's an' a farmer's who had chickens an' eggs. Goin' in, I says to the butcher, 'Gimme a job,' I says. 'I ain't got no work,' says 'ee. Then I says t' the farmer in the next stall, says I, 'Gimme some work; I'm hungry.

Gimme a dozen eggs, an' I'll do a day's chores fer yuh.' 'I ain't got no work,' he says. So I slipped behind the stove t' warm.

"Well, sir, they was a bunch o' chickens huddled on the floor at the eend o' the counter, with their legs tied; an' one of 'em, a dominecker, comes flop, flop, flop, over my way, tryin' t' hide, I reckon; fer it put its head down between my feet, shut its eyes an' laid still. It looked like a special invite t' a hungry man, a special dispensation o' Providence. The farmer was n't lookin'. 'The Lord will pervide,' I says, an' picked the chicken up an' hid it under my coat. It cuddled close, an' was still. Onct I come mighty nigh puttin' it down again, but I thought o' my little shanty an' the box I kep' fer a cupboard, an' how empty it was, an'—an'—well, I mosied out, soft-like.

"Yessir, I mosied out, just like a thief—me, Tom Hook, who had my faults, but was always honest. Well, well! I reckon it had t' be.

"They ain't much more fer t' tell. They

ketched me. I reckon I was awkward, not bein' used to the Lord's way o' pervidin'. Jedge an' jury set on me, an' 'lowed I'd have t' go t' Jeff fer a right smart spell. The jedge 'lowed he was sorry, but, says 'ee, 'Life ain't all beer an' skillets,' says 'ee, er words t' that effect. They toted me over on the dinky (they got a dinky line t' Jeff now, an' over the river, on the new bridge). The boys come down t' the depot t' give me a good send-off, but I didn't feel like no hero; I wanted t' hide my face from the eyes o' my feller man.

"Well, sir, we hadn't gone more'n two blocks when ole Hi Nickleson got on the train, goin' t' Jeff, er over the river, I disremember which. You mind him? The little whiffet! County treasurer as fer back as the oldest inhabitant kin remember, until that spring they found out the county didn't have as much money as she'd ort by twenty thousand dollars. Still, when he goes t' Jeff he don't have no deputy-sheriff along t' keep him from gittin' lonesome. He come a-struttin'

down the aisle, an' he up an' says, says 'ee, lookin' down at my bracelets, 'Whut fer did you hook that chicken?' An' I says t' him, says I, ''Cause I didn't have no chanct at the county funds,' says I. An' he didn't stay no longer.

"Well, that made me feel some peerter fer a spell, but when we got out o' town, the dinky train begun t' sing a song t' me, 'cause o' the things a-runnin' in my mind an' the wheels goin' dumpy-de-dump-dump on the rails. First thing was, 'Hook—Hook—Hook,' jest like that; regular, callin' out my name, like soldiers marchin' an' sayin', 'Left, left.' Then it was, 'Hook-a-chicky, hook-a-chicky, hook-a-chicky, Hook—Hook—Hook.' The words made me raise outen my seat, mighty nigh; but the wheels went right on, 'Dom-inecker, dom-inecker, dom-inecker, Hook—Hook—Hook, hook-a-chicky, hook-a-chicky, dom-inecker, hook-a-chicky, Hook—Hook—oh Lord! them words will go trampin' through my mind till I die."

The Julep-Devil's head sank low on his

breast, and his hearers suffered his silence to remain unbroken. After a time he raised his head, and went on, "Of course, I—I ain't blind t' the humorous character o' this here episode, an' I don't calculate you think I am. But sometimes I 'low things git less an' less funny the nearer you git to 'em; an' that's whut's the matter with me.

"Well, that's all—that's all. My life is mighty nigh spent; an' things I looked forward to, so fer away I thought they'd never come, have come an' gone, long gone. An' some have come that I didn't look forward to—no, not at all. I reckon I've been mighty wicked, but the Lord ain't goin' to be too hard on an ole feller like me. I reckon he'll say whut the jedge said, 'Life ain't all beer an' skillets.'"

The old man paused and looked up at the sky a moment, then rose painfully, and moped silently away.

The fringe of spiky leaves edged the black bulk of the sentinels silhouetted against the sky—the deep, star-set sky; the unfathom-

able blue silence above; and below, a man and a woman—two specks and the Immensity!

"Is He mindful of us, do you think?" Ruth asked, as she contemplated the heavens.

"It's one of the things I've given up. I suppose my life is the history of a failure. Now I know that I aspired to divinity; but divinity is silent—keeps its own counsel. There may be a hidden purpose in what we have to endure; but it looks to me like chance—the chance of events working one upon the other and upon helpless man. Fate! Life seems to be the tossing of a coin; and a coin has two sides. We ought to be happy enough if we can toss a second time when we lose the first. You remember the professor, Ruth? I was with him in the charge; a captain of regulars. I saw him struck, and laid him straight when he was dead. He told me some things I did not know before—about long ago; our lives might have been different if I had known. So runs the life of man. We yet have a long waiting,

you and I. Shall we wait—here on the knob?"

Her face, cast upward to the sky, received its soft light, and her heart its benediction; her voice was low and melodious. "It is what I have waited for."

He took a thin leathern book from his pocket, extracted some folded sheets of paper, and put them into Ruth's lap. She unfolded them. A flat and withered violet dropped out. In the faint light of the sky she made out the title of some verses.

And Gee-Boy, looking up at his star, felt the Infinity that brooded upon it, and her.

THE END

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